HERBERT LACY.

BY

THE AUTHOR OF GRANBY.

IN TWO VOLUMES.

La morale est la science des sciences à ne la considérer que sous le rapport du calcul; et il y a toujours des limites à l'esprit de ceux qui n'ont pas senti l'harmonie de la nature des choses avec les devoirs de l'homme.

MADAME DE STAEL.

VOL. II.

PHILADELPHIA:

CAREY, LEA & CAREY—CHESNUT STREET.

SOLD IN NEW YORK, BY G. & C. CARVILL,—IN BOSTON HILLIARD, GRAY, & CO., AND RICHARDSON & LORD.

1828.

HERBERT LACY.

CHAPTER I.

Suspicions among thoughts, are like bats among birds; they ever fly by twilight.

BACON.

LACY repaired from these trying scenes, to the still remaining painful task of acquainting his father with the sudden downfal of his hopes. The expression of his countenance, as he entered the room, sufficiently prepared Sir William for the evil tidings that were to follow.

"Where have you been?" said the latter, looking anxiously at his son.

"To Dodswell," replied Herbert; and then, without further preface, in a few simple words, he described the discovery of the preceding night, and the interview which he had undergone that morning.

"It is a strange affair," said the Baronet, when his son had finished his painful recital, "and I cannot understand it. It is but a week, Herbert, since I saw you both together: I could then have sworn that she felt a preference for you; and if this was not the case, and my old judgment is de-

ceived by modern manners, still I must think her more deficient in discernment, than the very weakest of her sex, not to perceive that you betrayed a more than common admiration for her; yet never could I see, that she repelled or received your attentions coldly—no, not even in the presence of Sackville; nor did he seem jealous, or uneasy.—And yet, under the circumstances, what else could have been expected? I cannot understand it, Herbert: but answer me one thing—do you believe that she is really attached to Sackville?"

"I have seen no symptoms of attachment," replied Herbert; "indeed, all that I have seen and heard, except this startling fact of their actual engagement, leads me to conclude the contrary. I can remember, that once at Huntley, she spoke of him rather coldly—could that be artifice? No! no, she is superior to artifice. Yet that was scarce two months since, and surely betokened nothing like increasing attachment. In fact, both at the ball, and this morning, she seemed unhappy—deeply so, as if there were something on her mind. It is a mystery, quite a mystery; I cannot understand it."

Both were silent for a while, and seemed to be pondering on the peculiarities of the case. Sir William was the first to speak. "I do not pretend," said he, "to solve the mystery completely, but I cannot stifle my suspicions. There has been some trick, some juggle. She has been sacrificed to Sackville."

"Good heavens, Sir!—but how? and why?"

"Nay, I know no more than you. I judge only from your description, and from what I observed of her manner last week. I cannot help thinking that the poor girl has been driven into this match, against her will. She is a wealthy prize, and Sackville is one of her trustees, and he must know, that

she is well worth winning, be she attached to him or not."

"It is just possible," said Herbert; "but I should be unwilling to think, that Sackville would lend himself to such a transaction."

"So should I, Herbert, and though your opinion may be false, I like to hear you express it. A proneness to suspicion is least commendable in a young man; and I am glad to see that you have no disposition, to think worse of others than you can help. Sackville has been, on one occasion, a valuable friend to you; and I shall ever hope for an opportunity of showing him the gratitude that a father ought to feel. Perhaps I have betrayed a want of this, in allowing myself to entertain injurious suspicions of him; but remember that I have received no pledge of his virtues except your praise, and *that*, when your affections are prepossessed is apt to be somewhat lavishly bestowed. But we will not pursue this subject. It only gives you needless pain; and our speculations upon it are utterly unavailing. Miss Morton, whether willingly or not, has engaged to give her hand to another, and it is not for us to interfere. I wish I could give you any comfort or assistance. I believe silence is the best balm; and let me assure you, my dear Herbert, that I will never henceforward wound you, by wantonly dragging forth your disappointment as a subject for my discussion: but, at the same time believe me when I say that my ears, will always be open to the slightest syllable, you may choose to utter."

Here the subject was dropped, and, as it seemed to both parties, was never again to be resumed. Sir Willian Lacy, though he felt compassion for the afflictions of his son, was not eventually sorry to see him precluded from forming a connection which he had so many reasons for disliking; and

notwithstanding the opposite tendency of his just suspicions, he chose to take it for granted that Miss Morton was irrevocably lost to Herbert. Nor did Herbert himself think otherwise; for even when he admitted the tempting supposition that Agnes might, by possibility, secretly prefer him to Sackville, and that a trifling exertion on his part would enable him to supplant his rival, still he recoiled with generous firmness from such a plan when he reflected that this rival was the man to whose prompt exertions he had owed his life.

About a fortnight now elapsed without any further communication between the families at Lacy and Dodswell: nor did any tidings reach the former respecting the Mortons, or any of their connections, except an announcement which the baronet made one morning to his son, that Lord Rodborough, as he was informed, in a note from Allen, had concluded the purchase of the Bloxwich estate. "Here is the note," said the Baronet; and Herbert took it and read it through.

"There is one part," said he, "which I don't understand; 'I am glad that my hint was not thrown away.' What does he refer to?"

"Heaven knows," said the baronet, carelessly; "I hope it was that I should burn his letter, for I certainly did it—half read. Come, Herbert, don't put on that long expostulating face—I know what you mean—and if I was not exempted, *jure paterna*, you would read me a lecture on carelessness in matters of business; but it would be of no use—it would not convert me—I hate your precisions in petty affairs."

Not long after the time when this conversation took place, a meeting was convened at the County Hall, at ———, for the purpose of petitioning parliament for the speedy abolition of slavery. Sir William, who had been reading a good deal on

that subject, had warmed himself, by a course of pamphlets, into a strong feeling of interest; and Herbert, who let slip no opportunity of drawing his father from his retirement, and inducing him to associate more freely with his neighbours, gladly took advantage of the present bias of his mind to engage him to attend the meeting. They accordingly went; and Herbert, who was solicitous to wean himself from his own distresses, by fixing his attention upon other objects, would have received much gratification from its proceedings, had not the consciousness of one circumstance, of a different nature, soon become painfully obtrusive. Once before, at a general muster of the gentlemen of the county, Herbert had been pained by observing the very little consideration in which his father seemed to be held. Remembering, this, he was, in the present instance, rather curious to see whether any improvement manifested itself in the cordiality with which he was received by his neighbours: but he saw, to his sorrow, that their general demeanor was, by no means, more favourable, and that there were now instances of actual avoidance which amounted almost to rudeness; and even in the very persons who had formerly shown some degree of courtesy.

Mr. Morton, in particular, guardedly abstained, throughout the meeting, from exchanging a word or even look, with Sir William Lacy or his son. Herbert was a good deal hurt at this, though he could easily conceive that the susceptible temper of Mr. Morton might have discovered some ground of offence which would awaken his former grudge: the cause however, of a similar coldness in others, was utterly beyond his comprehension. It was a subject in which delicacy forbad him to make any observations to his father, who was evidently chagrined at the reception he had experienced; and

though he endeavoured to laugh it off in a vein of caustic pleasantry, was, in reality deeply mortified.

The treatment which he had received rendered him still more averse to society; the neighbourhood became hateful to him; every man, in Sir William's imagination, seemed to be his enemy; and with a morose stubbornness of determination, which in him was unusual, he refused to appear, or admit any visiters to his house, during the great annual assemblage of the principal families of the county, at the Henbury races, which were to take place in a few days. His refusal was the more extraordinary, and was the more strenuously combatted by Lady Lacy, because their son-in-law, Charles Hartley, was to be one of the stewards—the other steward was Lord Malvern.

CHAPTER II.

> Strange though it seem—yet, with extremest grief
> Is link'd a mirth—it doth not bring relief—
> That playfulness, of sorrow ne'er beguiles,
> And smiles in bitterness—but still it smiles.
>
> BYRON.

AT length the first day of the races arrived. Hartley, whose office obliged him to be on the spot, was staying in Henbury with his wife and sister; and on the morning of the first day, Lady Lacy and Herbert went with them, and some other friends, to the course.

England presents few more animating or characteristic spectacles than that truly national one, a race-course. What a medley of objects does it comprise! The neat light stand; the tent-like booths; the grotesque shapes of caravans, with their broad display of painted canvass, well peopled with glaring monsters; the high and ever moving swings; the carriages of every form, hue, and denomination, from the coroneted coach and six to the humble donkey-cart, or the uncouth wagon, with its twenty insides—while the formal barricades which line the course, crown with an air of order the seeming irregularity of the whole.

But how great is the addition to this *coup d'œil*, if we take some note of the animated objects that fill the picture! The bright array of figures, gleaming from the balcony of the stand—the humbler throng that move below—the horsemen and their

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steeds—the miscellaneous concourse of pedestrians —motley coloured tumblers—honest blue-stockinged countrymen, in grey or russet—the liveried figures dispersed among the mass, and contrasting their gay dresses with the coarser habiliments of the mob. Nor must we forget the recruiting party, which seldom fails to swell the crowd—the drum and fife, and stately sergeant at the head—and a long train of ill-starred youths, with colours in their hats, trying to assume a martial strut, though looking half repentant of their bargain.

But what is the pictorial pleasure arising from such a scene, compared with the interest of that event, which seems at once to fill every head and strain every eye, whether of the youthful beauty in the stand, or the grave, cool *black-leg* above stairs.

The countless throng are about to be repaid for a long period of expectation: a bell has been heard —they are saddling the horses—in a few minutes, two appear, and gallop towards the stand. The race must be begun—no—they are soon pulled in, and walked back—and then two more appear in sight—and then another—and still another, and are similarly paraded before the spectators; while cards are studied with increased attention, and blue, and red, and buff, and orange, assigned to their respective owners. Then, one by one, they all walk back—and, at some distance from the stand, a crowd appears to be forming itself; and horsemen flock in eager haste from various points to this one quarter. Then expectation begins to be more strongly painted in every face, and there is an increased stillness in the crowd. Then again, a bell is sounded, and is followed by a stillness deeper than before. Then, all at once is heard on every side a low murmur; one single sentence bursts simultaneously from the assembled multitude; and "They

are off!" is exclaimed at the same instant by a thousand tongues. The crowd divides, and six horses swe.p in line from the distance-post towards the stand.

The equality is not long preserved—before two hundred yards are traversed, one is far ahead—the two next run almost abreast; then follow the others successively: and the favourite is last but one. Soon the leading horse begins to slacken his speed, and the three first are close together—the struggle is now between these; and the vaunted favourite succeeds only in passing the fourth. But every instant, the aspect of the race is altered. The horse which led, is now third; and the contest for pre-eminence is confined to two. More than half the course is traversed—the two first are far ahead—and the favourite only abreast of the third horse. He cannot win. 'Tis "the two first against the field" for any odds. And now you may offer to name the winner, for one of the two is a length ahead, while the favourite is third, and several yards behind the second. They approach the distance post, and the race is still between those two—no—one has failed completely, and has dropped at once, not only far behind the first but even behind the favourite also.

And now the latter is perceived to gain gradually on the first horse—he is three lengths behind—two—one—and now, you say he has a chance—but, no—he does not seem to gain any longer upon the other, whose rider, dressed in yellow, whips hard and keeps his station. The rider of the favourite does not whip—he seems to be pulling in—perhaps he knows that he must lose—it is but thirty yards to the winning chair. A shout is heard of "yellow wins!" and "blue for a thousand!" and the roar is tremendous, and "blue, blue!" is the prevailing cry.

In another second, all is decided—blue all at once lets out his horse—the effect is instantaneous—he passes the other like a shot, within a few yards of the winning chair—"blue," is shouted louder than ever, and all is lively exclamation; and your excited feelings (if a novice) are not cooled till, on turning, with loud commendations on the excellent race, to the experienced man of the turf at your elbow, you are told, with a quiet smile, that it was a hollow thing from the first; that the yellow never had a chance; and that blue held in all the time, and might have won by half a distance.

Such was the scene which was presented on the Henbury race-course on the first day, when Herbert Lacy attended the stand. Our description of it is not such as would have come from him; but is rather that of a novice, much amused, and strictly attentive to the peculiarities of the scene before him. But, in Herbert's case, feelings of another kind now filled his thoughts, and prevented him from experiencing that lively interest which he generally took in all that was passing around him. He knew it was probable that he might here again meet Agnes; and though he had no doubts with respect to the line of conduct which he ought to take, he felt that it would be difficult to assume the unembarrassed cheerfulness of mere acquaintanceship.

Agnes was almost the first person he saw, as he entered the stand with Charlotte Hartley hanging on his arm. The reports of their supposed engagement had never reached him, or this circumstance would have given him some uneasiness. Agnes was at that time sitting rather remote from him, surrounded by persons, most of whom he knew only by name; and as Herbert, however anxious to accost her, was careful to avoid all approach

to familiarity of manner, he first addressed himself to such acquaintance as lay more immediately in his way.

Having gone through the necessary course of greetings, with persons whom he was neither glad nor sorry to see, he gradually moved towards that quarter of the room where Agnes was sitting. When he first entered, she had been grave; but now he found her in lively spirits, talking, as it appeared, gaily and amusingly to those around her.

This was not quite what he expected, and he was rather disturbed at its want of harmony with the state of his own feelings. He did not wish her to betray to the world her sense of the peculiarity of their situation: but as she knew what he had suffered on her account, he thought that in his presence she need not have been quite so cheerful. In this reproachful mood did he advance to speak to her, striving, in bitterness of heart, to mould his features into the same air of cheerfulness, and hoping that he should at least be rewarded by a cordial address.

But Agnes was in no haste to notice him. Her whole mind at that moment seemed to be engaged in the formation of a lottery, and she was trying to obtain a pair of scissars to cut up a card.

"Who will befriend me?" said she, looking round as Lacy drew near; "I know I must apply to a gentleman—no lady carries any thing half so useful. Mr. Luscombe—oh, thank you—what an excellent friend you are! You are like the man in Peter Schlemihl, with the inexaustible pockets—don't bow, for it is not a compliment. Thank you, Mr. Lacy, they are quite well. Who is our treasurer?—My father is not here this morning.—Are Sir William and Lady Lacy here?—Now, Mr. Sedley, you may draw."

And then, without bestowing another look on Lacy, she went on with lively conversation, to her other acquaintance, about the arrangements of their lottery.

Lacy was surprised and mortified. A sense of the awkwardness of his situation, added, perhaps, not a little to his distress. He had introduced himself, for the sake of accosting her into the centre of a large group of persons, whom, with the exception of Luscombe, he did not know; and when she refused to attend to him, he had no longer any one to address. He stood for a short time, a silent spectator of their proceedings, and then, feeling himself an intruder in the circle, he turned round and walked away. He retired with no enviable feelings. He entertained for the moment, strong displeasure against Agnes, the stronger, perhaps, from the ardency of his attachment; for a slight wounds more severely, in proportion to our regard for the person that offers it.

But this sentiment was soon changed into vexation at his own behaviour. Why so imprudently eager to address her? Why introduce himself into a group of persons, amongst whom she alone could be the object of his attention? Was this his delicacy? This his caution? Would his avoidance have offended her, or argued indifference? No, she would acknowledge the propriety of his course; and there had passed *that* at there last meeting, which no trifling omission of commonplace ceremony, could cause her to forget. All this he could admit; but still he was offended at her liveliness of manner. It might, it was true, be assumed; but still, why to such excess? Alas! he did not reflect, that it was no easy task for Agnes to regulate the display of her fictitious gaiety.

Plunged in these harassing ruminations, he stood apparently listless and unobservant in the midst of the cheerful scene around him. He tried at length to arouse himself to the enjoyment of the present moment. He succeeded in personating the calm observer; heard the buz of conversation, and could catch such imperfect scraps as the following.

"Mr. Sackville—Miss Morton—engaged long before she came out."—"Hartley, what did you do at Doncaster?"—I did not *do*, I was *done*."—"How d'ye do, Lady Appleby?"—"Quite well, thank you—particularly sorry—quite delighted—so much obliged."—"Good races, Lord Appleby."—"Why—a—yes—but, between ourselves, I—"—"Who is that?"—"I must ask Mrs. Poole."—"That? oh, his name is"—(inaudible)—"Rich?"—"Very, his father kept a lottery-office—one must not inquire how money comes or goes either, in these sort of places."—"Mr. Luscombe, might I beg."—"Too happy—pray allow me."—"Midhurst, what did you kill on the moors?"—"Forty brace of grouse, and a setter."—"Pretty."—"Paints."—"Must be natural."—"No, I assure you—rouges slily—'blooms unseen,' as the poet says."—"What have you drawn?"—"Lord Rodborough's Artaxomines."—"Been drawn already—does not run."—"Tell me—do—what *is* a handicap?"—"A handicap, Miss Tyrwhitt? oh, a handicap is——"—"I am sorry to hear it—should be careful—might have been distanced."—"Party from Westcourt."—"Seven to four."—"Marriage talked of."—"Birds wild."—Candlelight beauty"—"Ordinary before dusk."

Dissatisfied with all about him, Lacy strove to beguile the irksomeness of the time by change of scene; and soon quitted the stand for the winning

chair, where, amongst others, he found the stewards, his brother-in-law, and Lord Malvern,—"L'Allegro," and "Il Penseroso," as they had been not unaptly named. Hartley was, as usual, all life and good humour, and would soon have raised the spirits of Lacy, almost to their customary level, had not the cold and distant manner of Lord Malvern rather pained and surprised him. Lord Malvern had much natural reserve; but with Lacy, whom he seemed to like, he had been accustomed to throw it off; and his altered behaviour in the present instance, was consequently calculated to cause the latter some uneasiness.

Another circumstance occurred, at the same time, which, though slight, made rather a strong impression on Lacy. While in the steward's stand, he saw Mr. Morton crossing the course, as if with the intention of coming there also. When he was close to it, Lord Malvern who was leaning over, spoke to him, and Lacy understood him to answer, that he was coming to join their party. Mr. Morton was at the foot of the steps, when Lacy suddenly changed his position, and as the former looked up, their eyes met. At that instant, Mr. Morton seemed to Lacy to check himself; turned his head quickly in another direction; looked up and down the line of carriages, as if searching for somebody; and then, all at once, as if having found the object of his search, walked hastily away.

Lacy followed him with his eyes, and perceived, that instead of going in the direction in which he seemed to look, he returned again, after taking a circuitous route, to the stand. There was little in his conduct, that would have excited observation, had not Lacy been predisposed to attach an interest and importance to all his movements. Lord Malvern and Hartley, neither of them made any re-

mark; no more did Lacy: but he thought much, and inferred that Mr. Morton had been studying to avoid him, which opinion contributed not a little to swell the aggregate of painful feelings which that morning had produced.

CHAPTER III.

> Beware
> Of entrance to a quarrel; but being in,
> Bear it, that the opposer may beware of thee.
> *Hamlet.*

After quitting the course, Lacy repaired to the ordinary, and from thence, after two or three hours of forced joviality, he gladly proceeded to the ball. This ball was a great event in the county, and usually produced a numerous assemblage of the country families, for many miles round. It was generally pronounced to be well attended, and it was so on the present occasion. The Rodboroughs had lent all their consequence to dignify Lord Malvern's stewardship; and Hartley, though little supported, either by his own or his wife's relations, had, by dint of activity, and his own popularity, secured a considerable attendance of his particular acquaintance; and had especially deserved the thanks of the chaperons for bringing so large a number of young men. Herbert went to the ball as one of Hartley's party; and, as might have been expected, the two stewards, with their immediate friends, were among the first arrivals.

A large room, ill filled, is always a melancholy sight; and such was this when Lacy entered it.—It contained scarcely any but Lord Malvern's party, who were in a group together at the further end, and comprised, in addition to many others,

Lord and Lady Rodborough, the Ladies Sedley, Lady Malvern, Sackville, Agnes Morton, and her father. Hartley, who preceded the others, had already, when Lacy came in, paid his respects to this assemblage, and had now returned to his own set, which formed a corresponding group at the other end of the room.

The Rodborough family were not eminently popular. They had the reputation, among their country neighbours, of being fine and fastidious, which was true of all except Lord Malvern, whose cold, reserved habits, nevertheless, caused him to be unjustly charged with the greatest proportion of this failing. The Hartleys' party, therefore, though bearing no ill-will towards the Rodboroughs, did not feel inclined to traverse the whole extent of a long room for the purpose of accosting persons from whom they were by no means secure of a cordial reception. The same feeling, in some degree, withheld Lacy, who, though he might no longer seek the society of Agnes, and could take no pleasure in that of Sackville, would not so long have held back had it not been for the unpleasant doubts conveyed to his mind by the manner of Lord Malvern and Mr. Morton towards him that morning. It was, therefore, natural that he should shrink from approaching a circle in which his reception was so doubtful, and in which at any rate, the presence of Agnes must awaken agitating thoughts.

By degrees, however, the room began to fill—the formidable blanks were lessened, and on Hartley moving upwards to concert measures for a commencement with his fellow-steward, and to claim, in his official capacity, the hand of Lady Mary Sedley, Herbert availed himself of this arrangement to enter the circle, and go through his course of recognitions.

The result was not encouraging. Lord Rodborough was cold and distant; Lady Rodborough, though not uncivil, seemed less disposed to talk to him than she had been at her own ball; Lady Malvern, with whom he had become well acquainted at Huntley, now treated him as a comparative stranger. Sackville, though perfectly friendly in his manner, was too much engaged in talking to others to give him much of his attention. Mr. Morton appeared to be manœuvring to avoid him, and acknowledged him only with a grave bow; and Lacy had the additional pain of observing that the countenance of Agnes, which had been in some degree animated till his approach, was then suddenly chilled into reserve.

Thus met, he soon withdrew in mortification and disgust. For the coldness of the Rodboroughs he cared little; but the estrangement of the Mortons gave him much concern, and he would gladly have pressed for an explanation of its cause, had not feelings, which can easily be imagined always prevented him whenever that wish arose. He tried to dismiss them from his thoughts, and resolved in a moment of pique, not only to devote himself exclusively to others, but to let them see that it was not in the power of their caprice to check the flow of his gaiety. The principle of reaction is very visible in the operation of the mind; and, after the depression which Lacy had endured, when he came to assume a contrary tone, his excited spirits vented themselves in an excess of mirthfulness; and his air and conversations which were usually animated, now became lively in an increased degree. He felt no real exhilaration: it was but a feverish excitement, which, on subsiding, would again leave him in depression. Nor was it easy gaiety: it had in it a degree of recklessness, which, in a private circle, would

have been soon observed; but, in a crowded ball-room, these nice shades were less distinguishable, and it easily passed for the genuine effervescence of lightened spirits. Never had he been so lavish of attentions to Miss Hartley; and instead of being indifferent and abstracted, as at the ball at West-court, he was now cheerful and attentive, and exerted himself for her entertainment.

Miss Hartley, who was really very pretty, and looked particularly well upon this occasion, seemed a very natural and deserving object of his homage; and many were induced to believe that Herbert was paying serious court to her, especially as Lady Lacy, who was highly delighted with her son's conduct, though she indeed refrained from saying any thing, contrived to look a great deal. The consequence was, that the report of Herbert's attachment to Miss Hartley, which before had been gently whispered, now received strong confirmation, and began to be very confidently mentioned by the various retailers of gossip.

On the following morning, the second and last day of the races, Lacy looked in vain for Agnes at the stand: neither did he meet with Mr. Morton, nor did any circumstance occur which tended to produce a change in his feelings. Lord Malvern still preserved the same unsocial coldness, and Lacy felt too proud and indignant to endeavour to remove it.

At length the sports of the course were terminated, and the gentlemen repaired to the noisy discomfort of a race ordinary, to partake of a bad dinner, and worse wine; and to endure afterwards a weary hour of tumultuous absurdity, the little conversational merriment which any of them could enjoy, being repeatedly checked by a vehement thumping on the table, the precursor of some hacknied toast, which had been handed down

from race to race, and doomed, by prescriptive right to be hailed with the idle clamour of three times three.

Mr. Morton was present at this dinner, and though he sat at no great distance from Lacy, on the other side of the table, abstained from all signs of recognition. Lacy, who was unwilling to think that he had given him any just cause of offence, and felt that perhaps his own manner might have conveyed a false impression of unfriendliness, determined not to omit any opportunity of arriving at a better understanding. The obvious attention of asking Mr. Morton to drink wine with him, he thought might possibly afford an opening for some resumption of civility. For some time he vainly endeavoured to catch his eye, or make him hear the invitation, and failing in this was obliged to have recourse to the surer method of sending round his message by a servant. To this message he received the singular answer that Mr. Morton had lately drank wine with another person, and begged to be excused; and Lacy was left in little doubt as to the existence of actual ill-will.

The dinner was ended; the wine had circulated: the muster-roll of toasts had at length been expended; the members for the county, and the members for the borough; the gentlemen who had sent their horses, and the owners of those that had won; the present stewards, and the stewards elect, had severally received their compliment, and returned their thanks; the steward had left the chair: the company had risen, and some were departing, and some were assembling in little knots in various parts of the room. By degrees the party grew thinner and thinner, till few were left except the immediate friends of the two stewards. Lacy and Hartley went out to give some orders, and in a few minutes returned.

As they entered, Mr. Morton was standing with his back towards them, at a little distance from the door, engaged in conversation with another gentleman, and Lacy could not avoid hearing distinctly a good deal of what they said. "Sneaking policy—dirty proceeding," were the first words which caught his ear. Then Mr. Morton's companion said something that was not audible, and Mr. Morton afterwards proceeded in rather a loud and angry tone—

"One cannot call such a man a gentleman. I never knew a more paltry method of currying favour—think of a person in his situation concealing his knowledge of a defective title!—making a merit of resigning the first refusal of an estate which he had been privately informed was not saleable! Pitiful, truly pitiful!"

Here he was checked by his companion, whose face was turned towards Lacy; and who, seeing him, said to Mr. Morton, in a low tone, "The son will hear you."

"I don't care if he does," replied Morton, whose natural irratibility seemed to have been rather inflamed by wine, "I am not ashamed of what I am saying; and I will repeat, be he present or not, that Sir William Lacy was privately informed that the Bloxwich property was not saleable, before he made a merit of letting Lord Rodborough buy it."

Lacy heard every syllable of this charge, and so also did Hartley, who took him by the arm, and seemed desirous of leading him onward; but Lacy resisted, and evinced an intention of going towards Mr. Morton.

"Never mind him," whispered Hartley fearful of some explosion.

"I must," replied Lacy; "he has made an assertion that must not pass uncontradicted."

"But he is half drunk, or he would not have said it."

"It matters not, he *has* said it; and whatever may be his state now, he formed the opinion in sober earnest," and, so saying, he broke from the grasp of his brother-in-law, and walked straight towards Mr. Morton, who drew himself up, on seeing him approach, into an attitude of proud defiance.

"Mr. Morton," said Lacy, in a steady tone, "I could not avoid overhearing your reflections on my father, and I think it right to tell you that you have been misinformed."

"Misinformed, Sir!" repeated Mr. Morton, with a sneer. "You might have used a shorter word—you might have told me that I *lied:* that was your meaning, I suppose."

"My meaning, Sir," replied Lacy, "was to vindicate my father; and the words which I used, were such as I thought would be least offensive."

"I am greatly beholden to you for your consideration; but you need not have beaten about the bush. I spoke plainly, and so might you. I hate all double dealing; and if you thought my assertion false, you might have told me so at once."

"Then I will tell you," replied Lacy, "I *do* think your assertion false. I have that confidence in my father's honour, that I can never allow myself to believe that he has acted as you would insinuate."

"Insinuate, Sir! I assert it—but I won't stay to bandy explanations with a person that has given me the lie. After that, there is only one fit answer; and that is, to call for satisfaction."

"I will talk to you no longer," replied Lacy turning from him, "while you are in this intemperate state."

"Intemperate! Insolence! I think, Sir, you

had already insulted me enough, without presuming to hint that I was drunk: but you shall hear more from me. This shall not end here."

"It is not my intention that it should," replied Lacy. "You have made assertions which I deny: the truth of that denial I will establish. The vindication of my father shall be complete; and for that end will we meet again." And so saying, Lacy turned round, and suddenly walked from him out of the room.

Hartley who had stood near, an astonished witness of the past scene, quickly followed and soon came up to him, and they walked together towards their lodging, for some moments in silence.

Hartley was the first to speak.

"Well, Herbert," said he, with a sigh, as if he had only then begun to breathe freely, "the gauntlet is thrown down, with a vengeance."

Lacy made no answer.

"I am sorry for it," pursued Hartley; "these things are very unpleasant. How could he speak as he did of your father! It was quite proper to contradict him; but I am sorry the affair has turned out as it has. I don't think he was quite himself. Perhaps it would have been better not to have spoken to him just then."

"No, Hartley," replied Lacy, "I cannot agree with you. Every minute that his assertion remained uncontradicted in my hearing, would have added fresh weight to the calumny. The denial of the charge must spring instantly from the genuine impulse of an honest conviction, or it can be of no avail. A contrary line of conduct would have argued a degree of timid caution, which I should have considered a compromise of my father's character."

"Well, well, I believe you are right; but I still

wish that every thing could have been explained without a quarrel."

He was going to have added more, when Lacy laid his hand upon his arm with an air of reproof, which silenced him.

"Hartley—spare me this," said he: "you cannot enter into all my feelings; you cannot know how much I have sacrificed to a sense of duty, and what it has cost me to engage in a quarrel with Mr. Morton."

No immediate reply was made; but, after a few minutes' silence, Hartley added, in a low tone, with a stronger pressure of his companion's arm—

"Forget my remarks, and forgive them. They were ill-timed, to say the least of them. You have a friend in me that will stand by you, happen what may—you understand me—you may want a second—though God forbid it should come to that."

Lacy thanked him for the offer, and asked him to be the bearer of a letter; talked with him for a few minutes on the circumstances of the case; enjoined secrecy, that the quarrel might, if possible, be prevented from reaching the ears of his relations; and then desired to be left alone to the exercise of his own reflections.

And sad and troubled were those reflections; and dreadful was the view they opened. The parent of Agnes Morton was the public calumniator of his father! The former circumstance he must endeavour to forget; he must view him only in the latter capacity. And how to redress his father's wrongs?—this was the only question which a son should ask; and he did ask it to himself, in firmness and sincerity of spirit, and it directed him to a line of conduct which should uphold his father's cause without closing the door on reconciliation.—He saw that something decisive must instantly be done; that the imputations had long been secretly

laid, and had gained credit among their neighbours. Their recent coldness sufficiently proved it; and as Sir William was unfortunately little known, and had engaged no favourable prepossessions to discredit the calumny, Herbert felt it the more incumbent on him to use vigorous measures to rescue his name from disgrace. The result of his deliberation was the following letter to Mr. Morton:—

"SIR,

"You have uttered, in my hearing, and in no measured terms, statements respecting the conduct of my father, which, as I solemnly believed them to be untrue, I could not, for an instant, suffer to pass uncontradicted. Your expressions, though intentionally hostile, I do not believe to have been intentionally false. I give you the fullest credit for a sincere faith in the truth of that which you alleged; and can make great allowances for the irritation which such a conviction might naturally produce. But with whatever degree of confidence such allegations might be made, I feel myself equally bound to notice them, and to take the directest method of resisting your attacks.

"With this view, I require from you a letter —to which I must be allowed to give all possible publicity—which shall express a sorrow for the intemperate nature of your language, and a willingness to suspend your unfavourable judgment, and also to co-operate with me in disproving the slander, and tracing it to its source. This is the least reparation which one gentleman can offer to the injured honour of another; and I ask it with a sincere confidence that it will not be refused. I can scarcely anticipate a refusal from one whose gentlemanly feelings I am willing to estimate highly;

but I will not disguise from you the alternative which such a refusal must entail. Great as is my aversion to the system of duelling, and deeply as I should regret the necessity of a hostile meeting with you, I should not regard the rescue of my father's character from unmerited obloquy too dearly purchased even at such a price.

"I will not, however, dwell upon these possibilities of evil; I will hope for a happier termination to our differences: and I shall hardly regret this temporary misunderstanding, if it shall be the means of bringing you to a truer estimation of the character of him whom you have been so hastily and unadvisedly led to calumniate."

The letter was written, shown to Hartley, and approved of by him; and within an hour from the time of Lacy's last angry parting from Mr. Morton, Hartley was on his way to deliver it to the latter.

CHAPTER IV.

> The secret mischiefs that I set abroach,
> I lay unto the grievous charge of others.
>
> *Richard III.*

We must now turn to Mr. Morton, who quitted the ordinary soon after Lacy, and retired to his apartment with feelings of no enviable description. Though somewhat heated with wine, and consequently in a state more than usually irritable, he could scarcely be said to have approached the verge of actual intoxication; and the passion of the moment was, therefore, soon permitted to subside into stubborn vexation, mixed with some portion of regret at the intemperate, or, what he feared might have seemed, ungentlemanly violence of his deportment. He had always a great value for appearances, and he dreaded having departed, even in a quarrel, from the external requisites of good breeding. He had a great deal of pride; but it was the pride of a little mind. He was angry with himself for having compromised his dignity; but he was only the more angry with the cause and witness of his error; and the more determined to regain what he thought his fallen height, by a spirited resistance to all expostulation.

In this frame of mind, he was joined by Sackville, who, though not in the room at the ordinary at the time of the quarrel, had received some obscure intelligence of what had passed, and now

came to learn from Mr. Morton the success of his own machinations. He had a difficult card to play: he had to repress inquiry into the origin of the disagreement, even while he pretended surprise and curiosity respecting its cause; and to inflame the anger of the contending parties while he ostensibly laboured to act the peace maker. Scarcely had he heard from Mr. Morton the story of his wrongs, than it was announced that Mr. Hartley was desirous of seeing the latter.

"He brings an apology, I suppose," said Sackville: "with your leave I will retire. You will doubtless think it more generous to receive the recantation alone."

Sackville went out, promising a speedy return, and Hartley was ushered in.

"Mr. Morton," said the latter, as he tendered a letter, "it is not my wish to press for a hasty answer to this letter; nor can I enter into any discussion of the circumstances which have produced it. I can only say that I regret them. You will reply at your leisure."

Mutual bows passed, and Hartley departed, leaving Mr. Morton to the perusal of Lacy's address. No sooner had he finished it, than Sackville returned, and the letter was put into his hands. His countenance, as he read it, assumed an appearance of mingled astonishment and grief.

"I am sorry for this," said he; "it is what I did not expect. It is a strange letter, half conciliatory, half—I was going to say, insulting; but I should be unwilling to think that he means to insult you. Do not let us give way to anger. Let us review his letter calmly."

"I *am* calm, said Mr. Morton, his features inflaming with anger as he spoke.

"If you were not," replied Sackville, laying his hand soothingly upon his arm, "it would not

much surprise me, considering, as I do, the provocation. I trust, however, that you can make considerable allowance for the indiscretion of a young man; though to be sure his youth ought to have made him more respectful; but young men will be hot and hasty. Yet, I dare say, he meant no great incivility—merely a contradiction."

"Oh, no! merely a contradiction!" said Mr. Morton, with a splenetic smile.

"And if his manner was not offensive——"

"It *was* offensive," interrupted Mr. Morton.

"I am truly sorry to here it," pursued Sackville. "He was probably very much irritated; and it is perhaps the conciousness of *that* which makes him say, that he can make great allowances for the irritation which *you* might have felt."

"Insolence!" muttered Mr. Morton, stung to the quick by the artful mention of this galling passage. "The suppositon of my irritation, Mr. Sackville, was a license of his own; and I can only regard it as an additional insult. Indeed the whole tenor of his letter is insulting. You know it is—and you cannot deny it."

Sackville sighed, but attempted no denial. "I wish to make the best of the case," said he. "I confess that Lacy and I are friends.—He owes me a service, and one is naturally partial to those whom one has befriended. In short, there is nobody with whom I more regret to see you at variance, than with him. But do not, my dear Sir, therefore suppose that I am inclined to neglect your interests, or forget your prior claims to my consideration. If I appear to regard your wrongs as slight, it is because I am anxious to avoid the consequences of a meeting. You see the conditions of the letter—an apology for what he calls the intemperate nature of your language—or—Good God! that it should come to that! a duel.

Oh! it must be prevented. I should be sorry that my anxiety for your safety should lead me to advise any humiliating step; but if it were possible by submission——"

"Submission! Mr. Sackville! do you know me so little as to expect——"

"Forgive me," interrupted Sackville, rising in well feigned agitation. "I scarcely know what I am saying—perhaps I was too careless of your honour—I was thinking only of your safety. Lacy is young, and hot, and resolute. He is of an ancient and haughty family, and is himself proud and high spirited. He is little likely to yield, and I have always found him as good as his word."

"Oh, I will believe him as terrible as you please," replied Mr. Morton, with increasing anger. "You need not entertain me with a description of his qualifications for a duellist—spare me his feats with sword and pistol. You ought to know that considerations like these can make no difference in my resolution, and that I am not to be bullied with impunity, if he were fifty times the proud, resolute, high-spirited person, that you are pleased to represent him."

He paced angrily across the room, while Sackville regarded him with a calm look of secret satisfaction. By assuming an imprudent eagerness to compose the quarrel, he had contrived at once to save his own credit, and so to inflame the pride of his companion, as to render reconciliation more difficult than before. Nothing was now wanting to the consummation of his projects but a duel between Mr. Morton and Lacy by which Sackville hoped to effect the perpetual estrangement of the two families.

"I have been considering," said he after a silence of a few minutes, "whether it is not possible to arrange this unfortunate affair so as to avoid

a meeting, consistently with a regard for your honour, which, however anxious for your safety I would be the last to compromise."

"And what do you suggest" said Mr. Morton.

"Would to God I knew how to answer you. You will not apologize—you must not fight him. Why return him any answer? Surely he will not dare to post you?"

"And can any friend of mine advise me to incur the possibility of such a disgrace?

"No, no!" exclaimed Sackville, hastily, and as if much agitated and perplexed. "I do not advise it; I do not know what to advise. This circumstance agitates and distresses me. I have only one feeling—for your safety—one wish—to prevent all evil consequences; but I am not capable of offering advice," and he turned away with well affected imbecility and dejection, leaving Mr. Morton to the uncontrolled guidance of those angry passions, which the insidious interposition of his false friend had goaded almost to frenzy.

Stung with a bitter sense of his wrongs, the latter, after one more angry glance at the least pacific parts of Lacy's letter, hastily took up pen and paper, and wrote the following answer.

"I accept your alternative. I do not shrink from the publicity with which you threaten me; but I will at least take care that you shall not publish a submission. I will not disappoint your evident wish for a hostile meeting. You will find me ready at six to-morrow. I claim the privilege of the challenged, in choosing time, weapons, and place of encounter. My weapons will be pistols. My second will arrange the rest."

The letter was written, and directed, before Sackville would choose to exhibit any consciousness of the proceedings of Mr. Morton, and he

started as if from a dream, when the latter approached him with a letter in his hand.

"Here is my answer", said he. "May I ask you to deliver it?"

"With pleasure," replied Sackville "if its contents are pacific."

"Do I understand you correctly?" exclaimed Morton. "Is your consent to bear my letter only conditional?"

"It is only conditional," replied Sackville. "I can be the bearer of no hostile answer; but do not, because I decline this office, doubt my friendship and willingness to assist you. The service which I once rendered to Lacy would make any such intervention extremely painful to me; and I trust that your kindness will spare me the trial. If I were the only person who could perform this office, the case would be different, and I would willingly make the sacrifice; but I am neither the only person, nor the most proper one. You have a a son-in-law, who has a prior claim, to have his services required. Lord Malvern, I am sure, will feel your wrongs as deeply as I can do, and he is more nearly connected with the cause of your misunderstanding. The quarrel, (if I may be allowed to say so,) is partly his, and he might feel hurt at not being applied to."

These arguments were sufficient; Mr. Morton, proud of his connection with the Rodboroughs, was glad to gain their co-operation in a quarrel, which if the merits of the case were examined, really belonged much more to them, than to himself. Permission was therefore given to Sackville, to request that Lord Malvern would be the ostensible intervening party between the challenger and the challenged; and so ingeniously was the case represented by Sackville, that Lord Malvern, full of indignation at the wrongs of his fa-

ther-in-law, fully acceded to every hostile measure in which he was required to co-operate.

About two hours, had now elapsed since the meeting at the ordinary. Lord Malvern had presented himself to Lacy, as the friend and second of Mr. Morton: had given his letter, and had retired to adjust with Hartley the preliminaries of the meeting; when Sackville having ascertained to what stage the business had advanced, at length repaired, with the studied appearance of haste and consternation, to the presence of Lacy, with the ostensible purpose of protesting against those extremities, which he trusted it was now to late to prevent.

After many exclamations of sorrow and surprise "Lacy," said he, with a well-assumed look of deep affliction, "it is a cruel circumstance for me that such a misunderstanding should have occurred between my two best friends, and that I should not have been able to make up the quarrel: but I hope it may still be possible. I know that you are not implacable, nor, I trust, is Morton. I am willing to think that he may be brought to listen to overtures. Perhaps some slight acknowledgment——"

"Acknowledgment! Of what?" said Lacy; "of the justice and generosity of his false attack upon my father's character? Of his public calumny of an absent person? Consider, Sackville, what you are proposing; and do not, in your eagerness for a reconciliation, so completely overlook the obstacles which lie in the way to it. You say you are willing to believe that Mr. Morton may be brought to listen to overtures: perhaps he may, but we have yet to learn, by whom those overtures can be made. I have shown a willingness to excuse his fault—and here," pointing to Morton's letter, "is the reward of my forbearance."

Sackville sighed, and looked imploringly at Lacy. "Forgive me," said he, "if I seem officious—I wished, if possible, to be the bearer of some message which might lead to an amicable arrangement."

"Have you any authority from Mr. Morton, to say that such a message would be favourably received!"

Sackville hesitated, and seemed anxious to avoid the question; and on Lacy's repeating it, answered, despondingly, in the negative.

"Then, where is your basis for an amicable arrangement?"

Sackville made no answer; and turned away with an audible sigh, which was meant to convey that there was none. It did convey that impression most strongly to the mind of Lacy: and thus had Sackville under the guise of a peace-maker, artfully contrived to incense both parties still more against each other, and to lead them to the belief that no further step remained for either than to fight. He had effected this without committing himself by any assertion that could be repeated to the detriment of his plans; and he had paralyzed and precluded the efforts of the seconds, by giving them to understand that the office of peace-maker was peculiarly his; and that his exertions, though aided by the advantage of a friendship with both of the parties, were entirely unsuccessful.

Thus deprived of the sincere good offices of their true friends, and exposed to the deep-laid treachery of a false one, the hostile parties advanced without one efficient check towards that unhallowed system, that remnant of barbarous contention, which the rules of modern society still prescribe as the best mode of appeasing the wounded feelings, and re-establishing the injured character, of its most elevated members.

CHAPTER V.

Le duel est le triomphe de la mode, et l'endroit où elle a exercé son empire avec plus d'éclat.

BRUYERE.

THOUGH it was known to several that angry words had passed between Mr. Morton and Herbert Lacy, yet the knowledge of the subsequent challenge, and its acceptance, was confined to five persons—the principals, seconds, and Sackville.—The Rodboroughs, Lady Malvern, and Agnes, had returned from the course to Westcourt and Dodswell, and could not be apprized of the circumstance. There was more danger of discovery on the part of Herbert's relations; for Lady Lacy and his sister were still staying in the town, and he and Hartley could not avoid seeing them that night. Hartley, though with a heavy heart, prudently resolved to absent himself, by fulfilling his duties at the ball, a woeful epilogue to that of the preceding evening. Herbert was perfectly successful in assuming the appearance of cheerfulness and composure; and quietly pleading an engagement on the morrow, as the cause of his return to Lacy Park, he mounted his horse and rode home. He found Sir William still up, engaged with a book that interested him, and little disposed to talk. He merely observed to his son that his coming was unexpected; made no inquiry about the races, concerning which, he rather piqued himself upon

showing no curiosity—and continued to read in silence.

"And this," thought Herbert, as he sat near his father, shading with his hand his agitated countenance, "and this, perhaps, is our last interview, and it must pass in indifference and silence; and I must utter nothing of all that I would say, nay, must talk with an air of carelessness, and take, perhaps, an eternal leave, as if we should meet on the morrow."

His agitation was very great, and if Sir William had not been much absorbed, he must have observed it.

"I must command myself," thought Lacy, "and break through this horrible silence." "Have you heard, Sir?" said he, "that——"

"My dear Herbert, I have heard nothing," interrupted the baronet, rather drily: "what should I hear in this cell of mine? Hermits have little to do with news: but come," he added, closing his book, "I will hear you talk for five minutes.—What was your piece of information?"

"That Lord Rodborough has purchased the Bloxwich property."

"I know that," replied Sir William.

"And that the title is defective."

"I know that too."

Herbert felt a sudden chill of ominous dread at these words; and confident as he had been of the integrity of his father, it was with trembling eagerness that he inquired how long he had possessed this knowledge—the answer re-assured him.

"A day or two," was the reply; and Herbert breathed more freely.

"And you never knew it before?" he added.

"Certainly, never—how should I?"

"I do not know—perhaps Allen——"

"Allen? he tell me? no, not he: besides, con-

sider, my dear fellow, that, if I had really known the circumstance, though I should have acted prudently in refusing the purchase, I could not, with propriety, have appeared to waive it in favour of another—that would have been dishonest—a piece of practical equivocation—I hope you view it in that light."

"Exactly, Sir, I perfectly agree with you."

Sir William then rose to retire, and Herbert felt with anguish that the terrible moment of parting had arrived. The baronet stopped to contemplate for an instant the haggard countenance of his son.

"Herbert," said he, "you look ill. You have been jaded and harassed with these races. You are a sight to moralize upon—a standing warning to all who make a toil of pleasure. But I cannot stay to moralize. You want rest, and so do I. Good night! Why, how now? have you any thing to say to me?"

"No, Sir—nothing."

"Why then, good night? Nay, surely you do not take me for your partner? that squeeze of the hand must have been meant for her. Is it some new divinity? or the old one reinstalled? Well, well, make your disclosures at your own good time, only do not let it be now. Come, what are we lingering about? once more—good night."

"Good night!" repeated Herbert, almost inaudibly, and fixed to the spot, and scarcely breathing, followed his father with his eyes till the closing door concealed him.

"Gone!" he murmured to himself, "and I may never see him more; and this perhaps was an eternal leave-taking!" He threw himself on a chair, and hid his face in his hands, in a short paroxysm of mental agony.

After a while he arose, and with a countenance calmer than before, "The struggle is past," said

he: "now to my duty." The task he had enjoined himself, and which he now prepared to execute, was a severe one, and demanded all his firmness. It was to inform his father, by letter, of all that had passed, and that still was to ensue, and the motives which influenced his conduct. This latter part of his address is the only one which it is necessary to transcribe.

"I do not know," he said, "how far my violent mode of vindication may meet with your deliberate approval. I might perhaps at the time be acting more under the influence of mere feeling than I was willing to believe; but still, when I calmly review my conduct, I am not disposed to condemn it.

"Do not however, suppose that I am therefore an advocate for duelling. I think that the instances are very few in which it is justifiable. I question whether I would ever call it more than a venial offence; but I consider that the degrees of criminality vary greatly, and that every case must be judged upon its own merits. I acknowledge, with respect, the authority of the law as a vindicator of wrongs; but these are wrongs, which the law cannot vindicate—and wounds which it cannot heal; and the customs of society have recognised this system as the only remedy in such cases. A more perfect state of society would probably have dispensed with such an ordeal: but we cannot change the constitution of the world, and must avail ourselves of such measures as are suited to the exigences of the time.

"In the present instance, an amicable inquiry might doubtless satisfactorily confute the calumny; but if the accuser persist in his hostility, and if I cannot call the attention of the public to a quiet examination of the case, I can at least show them the firmness of my own convictions. This practi-

cal appeal may have its effect upon minds that have not sufficient candour to be accessible to any other. I am now aware that the poison has long been secretly working when we were unconcious of it, and that some decided measure is necessary to check its progress. I am diffident of my own judgment, and of the solidity of these reasons: but I have another, which, bound as I feel to open to you my whole heart, I will not scruple to reveal.

"It was impossible,—it would have been wrong that you should not have been acquainted with the injurious reflections which had been cast upon your character. You must have known them in course of time, and knowing them, it is not improbable that you might have challanged your aggressor. This I could prevent only by forestalling your intentions, and rendering myself a hostage, and I am thankful to Providence for the chance which has enabled me to do so. I trust I shall meet my opponent without bearing with me any evil passion. I view him as a misguided person, and much as he has injured you, I feel rather grief than anger at his delusion. I wish him no injury, and shall endeavour not to wound him."

After having performed this task, his mind seemed unburthened of a load, and invigorated by the trial he had undergone. As the flow of his spirits abated, a sense of bodily fatigue came over him; and having offered his accustomed prayer at the throne of mercy, with more than usual fervour and solemnity, he threw himself upon a bed to snatch a short repose. Roused by no accusing conscience he soon yielded to the hand of nature and sleep surprised him pondering on the phenomenon of his own tranquillity.

When he awoke it was yet night, but a dim, grey light, the precursor of morning, was faintly

appearing in the east. No living creature had yet given signs of life; nothing met his eye but the distant gleam, a soleamn monitor of the lapse of time, and all between was dark and dubious as his own fate. He arose and looked out, and fixed his eyes intently on the brightening horizon.

"Soon," thought he, "all this scene will teem with light and life as usual—while I—I may never see it more, but living or dead, I shall have performed a painful duty."

With gentle steps he quitted his apartment, and sought the room where his father usually sat. He deposited his letter on the table; looked round at many well known objects, now faintley visible through the gloom, and then silently retired. In a few minutes he had quitted the house, mounted his horse, which he had privately ordered to be ready for him, and was on his road to Henbury. He dismounted at an inn near the outskirts of the town, and walked to the place where Hartley had appointed to meet him. As he approached the spot, he heard footsteps behind him, and on turning, saw his brother-in-law. Their only greeting was a silent pressure of the hand, and for a while no word was uttered. The object of their meeting was a topic which they approached with repugnance; and every other seemed irrelevant.

"We are before our time," was Hartley's first observation.

"We are, and it is best."

"Is your father informed?"

"No: happily he knows nothing. My mother and Emily——?"

"They have no suspicions."

"Thank God! Charles, if I fall, convey to them every assurance of my sincere affection; say, that my last, best wishes were for their happiness—

say to them—but I cannot express what I would—it is difficult to clothe in words all that one feels at such a moment as this—but you know my sentiments, and can supply what is wanting."

Hartley pressed his hand—but tears filled his eyes, and for a while he could not speak. "God forbid," said he at length, "that such a necessity should ever come. Do not think so gloomily of the case—why look on the dark side? It is exposing yourself to a needless trial."

"Nay not needless," replied Lacy. "I would have no calamity come upon me unawares. There is neither sense nor courage in shutting one's eyes to possible evils; and I trust I can look steadily at the worst—and now let us go to the ground."

A few minutes' walk brought them to the appointed place of meeting, a retired field, selected on account of its remoteness from both house and road. It was a grey, chill, autumnal morning—the sun had just risen, and was dimly appearing like a red globe through the dense mass of vapours which then lay heavy on the horizon. No breeze ruffled the trees—scarce a leaf stirred—not an insect was on the wing; and silence seemed to reign over the land, invaded only by the solemn measured croakings of the unseen raven. The cattle lay quiescent, their heads bearly emerging above a white veil of mist, which was spread over the surface of the earth, giving to the neighbouring fields the character of lakes, and making the low hedges rise around them with all the dignity of forests. It was nature under its most placid, and, at the same time, least cheering aspect.

Scarcely had Lacy and his companion entered and surveyed the scene, than two figures appeared to advance through the mist, from the opposite corner of the field. These were, Lord Malvern and Mr. Morton. The latter presently stopped

Lacy also fell back; and the two seconds advanced to make the preliminary arrangements. Many words had not passed between them, before another person was seen to approach, and they found themselves joined by Sackville. Hartley received him with an air of coldness and surprise.

"You come, I conclude as the friend of Mr. Morton." said he. "He probably remembers the proverb, 'in the multitude of counsellors there is safety.'"

"I trust that such will be the case," replied Sackville, calmly," "and not to him only. I come as the friend to both parties—I will not give up the last chance of reconciliation."

The seconds shook their heads. "If reconciliation had been possible," observed Lord Malvern, "we should not have met here," and without more words, they proceeded to make the preparations for the combat.

The ground was measured, the pistols loaded, the signal settled, and the parties had taken their respective stations. Sackville had once more demanded in terms which he knew would be repugnant to the feelings of each, whether either party was willing to prevent the possible effusion of blood, by making any timely concessions. A stern denial was their mutual answer. The seconds exchanged a sorrowing look—the signal was given—and Morton and Lacy fired at the same instant.

Neither took any aim, or even looked at his opponent. Their eyes were fixed upon their seconds in expectation of the signal, and their pistols lowered until it was given. Lacy's pistol, though his arm was straight, was directed upwards at the time he fired, by a slight elevation of the wrist, a circumstance, which however material, escaped the observation of the seconds. The smoke, ad-

ded to the mistiness of the atmosphere, rendered it difficult, at the first instant, to perceive the effect of the fire. It was, however, immediately ascertained, that each combatant still stood erect in his place; and an exclamation of thankfulness burst involuntarily from the by-standers.

Lord Malvern, Hartley, and Sackville, then advanced, and the latter inquired aloud if both parties were satisfied. Mr. Morton made no answer. Lacy stood immoveable, with arms folded across his breast. His mien was humble, rather than haughty: his countenance was very pale, and its expression was rather that of calm resignation, than the indignant stubbornness of a combatant.

"I came here," said he, in a low, but resolute tone, "to vindicate my father, and I repeat my first demands. I ask of Mr. Morton, that he shall publicly express a sorrow for his accusations, and a willingness to suspend his judgment; and that he shall consent to co-operate with me, in tracing, and disproving the slander which he allowed himself to utter. This is still my demand. Mr. Morton hears it: let him answer."

Mr. Morton's irritation had been gradually cooling since the period of the challenge, and he was now on the point of returning a conciliatory answer; when a look from Sackville, a look addressed to him alone, and bearing in it scorn and wonder, rekindled in an instant all the angry pride which had burned so fiercely the preceding night. An instantaneous change of sentiments ensued; he scowled defiance upon Lacy, and sternly rejected his conditions. The seconds wished to compose the difference; but each feared to compromise the honour of his friend, and each consequently scrupled to speak. There was no alternative but to fire again. Another pistol was put into the hand of each of the opponents; and the seconds drew back, and again prepared to give the signal.

At this instant, Lacy was seen to advance towards Mr. Morton, but with uncertain steps, and a bewildered air, as if not conscious what he did. Mr. Morton started, and uttered an exclamation: and the sudden and strange demeanour of both the combatants, was regarded with surprise by the seconds.

"Keep your ground," cried Lord Malvern.

"He is pale—he staggers!" said Sackville.

"Blood! I see blood!" exclaimed Hartley,—"he is wounded—save him!—save him!" and springing forward, he caught Lacy in his arms as he was sinking senseless to the ground. He had been wounded by the first fire, and had concealed the circumstance that he might better effect that vindication to which he had devoted himself.

CHAPTER VI.

Le commun des hommes va de la colere, a l'injure: quelques uns en usent autrement; ils offensent, et puis se fachent.
BRUYERE.

It would be difficult adequately to describe the effect of this unexpected and terrible discovery. All was grief and consternation. The angry pride of Mr. Morton was suddenly transformed into repentant sorrow; and with a quick revulsion of feeling, he bitterly bewailed alond the unhappy ehance which had rendered him the victor.

"Oh that I had fallen!" he exclaimed, in a tone of agony, as he knelt by Lacy, anxiously assisting to restore his wandering senses. Sackville pressed him to depart, and consider his own safety; but he was deaf to all such entreaties.

"I will not stir until he revives," said he.—"Let me at least know that I am not quite a murderer."

"Thank God! he does revive," said Hartley.

"He does! he does! God be thanked!" exclaimed Mr. Morton. "Mr. Lacy, I was hasty—I was wrong—I yield to your conditions."

"Do not linger—save yourself," said Sackville, seizing him by the arm.

"Away!" said Mr. Morton, "and let me make my atonement. Mr. Lacy, I abjure my suspicions of your father—I accede to all you asked."

Lacy's consciousness had returned, and though

a partial oblivion of the past attended his first recovery, he was sufficiently himself again to be aware of the important purport of Mr. Morton's words. He faintly signified his acceptance of the concession, and stretched out his hand in pledge of reconciliation. The pledge was promptly received; and the hands, that a few minutes ago had been armed for mutual destruction, were now joined in earnest of returning friendship.

Strange is the sudden revulsion of feeling, which powerful circumstances produce. Such happy results form one of the strongest among the practical arguments that are adduced in favour of the otherwise scarcely defensible system of duelling; and in opposition to such as object that the influence of these emotions is too sudden and violent to be lasting, it may be said, that the instances are not unfrequent, of those who have met in this hostile manner having lived long afterwards on terms of friendship.

The attentions of the whole party to Lacy were unremitted. A surgeon who, under pledge of secrecy, had been engaged by the seconds to be in readiness, and who had remained apart at a little distance, to wait the issue of the fire, now approached to afford his assistance and advice. The wound was happily discovered not to be dangerous, and Lacy's temporary insensibility, which had struck the party with such alarm, was pronounced to have proceeded only from the effusion of blood. His safe removal was now the object uppermost in their minds, and a carriage having been providently ordered beforehand to be stationed at a convenient distance from the place of meeting, Lacy was soon placed in it, to be conveyed to his brother-in-law's apartments in the town.

Though too weak to combat any of the arrangements that were made respecting his disposal, Lacy

was anxious to avoid all chance of sudden alarm to his mother and sister, and proposed to be conveyed elsewhere; but Hartley, influenced by the idea that his brother-in-law would be better there than any where else, overruled his objections, saying that they must know some time or other, and might as well be informed at first. The carriage conveying Lacy moved at a foot's pace towards the town, and considerable time elapsed before it arrived at the house.

Hartley, who had walked thither, arrived a few minutes before it, and was engaged in communicating the intelligence to Lady Lacy and Mrs. Hartley, when Herbert entered the house, assisted by Sackville and the surgeon. Not knowing where to conduct their charge, they opened the door of the nearest room, which happened to be the breakfast room, where Miss Hartley was sitting alone. She rose hastily, with some surprise at the unexpected intrusion; a surprise which soon grew into alarm as she cast her eyes upon the figure of Lacy, to whom, she saw at once, that something serious had happened.

Lacy wished to retire, but Sackville would not allow him; and directing the surgeon to lead him to the sofa, he advanced towards Miss Hartley, and in a few words explained the whole circumstance, of which, not having yet seen her brother, she was totally ignorant. Naturally timid, and endued with little strength of mind, hearing suddenly of the actual occurrence of horrors which she had hitherto thought almost fictitious, and which her imagination instantly magnified, and seeing in the pale countenance of Lacy enough to warrant her worst fears, she found the shock too great for her feeble nerves; and scarcely had Sackville uttered ten words, than she turned pale and fainted—Sackville caught her as she was about to fall, and Lacy him-

self, forgetting his wound, rushed forward to her assistance.

Lady Lacy, her daughter, and Heartley, entered the room immediately afterwards; and instead of finding a sympathizing group round the wounded Lacy, saw a new and unexpected sufferer in Miss Hartley: and all the interest and compassion which was due to Herbert; suddenly transferred to her. The perplexity which it produced, was, perhaps, to them a fortunate circumstance, and spared them from much needless anxiety; for they could not, on seeing Lacy, interested in the temporary sufferings of another, and seemingly regardless of his own situation, any longer entertain those extreme apprehensions which their imaginations, in the first instance, had been rather prone to magnify. They expected to have found Herbert almost senseless, and scarcely able to speak or move; and their first emotion, on now beholding him so engaged, was one of joyful surprise: but grief quickly followed; and greatly as their first fears had exceeded the truth, they still found in his actual state, much cause for lamentation.

Sir William Lacy soon arrived: his coming had been somewhat retarded by an interview with Mr. Morton, in the presence of Lord Malvern. Immediately upon Herbert's being taken from the ground, under the care of Hartley and Sackville, Mr. Morton formed the sudden resolution of going to Lacy Park, to inform the baronet of his son's state, and to offer, in person, his recantation. —It was a resolution formed before the tide of generous sorrow, and self-condemnation had begun to revert, and when atonement was felt to be, not only a duty, but a pleasure.

On his arrival, he found Sir William Lacy in much agitation. He had read his son's letter, and was on the point of setting out for Henbury. The

interview was short, but satisfactory; and, as it took place in the presence of Lord Malvern, it was effectual in removing those aspersions which had been hastily cast upon Sir William's conduct. Thus, scarcely had the baronet become informed of the attack which had been made upon him, than he received an atonement for the injury, and shook hands with the person whom, a few minutes before, he had considered as his mortal enemy.

The meeting between Sir William and Herbert was marked by much emotion on either side. Joy, at finding his son out of danger, and parental pride and gratitude for his noble defence of his reputation; the excitement, too occasioned by his interview with Mr. Morton, and the effects of the agitation he had undergone upon reading Herbert's letter, all now combined to overcome his firmness: he struggled, but in vain, to prevent the burst of overcharged feelings; till, at length, bending his head upon the shoulder of Herbert, he wept audibly.

After some time had passed, and their feelings had subsided into comparative calmness, Sir William, having expressed his warmest thanks to his son, for the promptness and self-devotion with which he had undertaken his defence, added, "Herbert, after what I have said, you will not, I hope, accuse me of coldness and ingratitude; and I may venture, without hurting you, to take another view of what has passed. Let us, in all circumstances, whether of great or little moment, proportion our means to the end we wish to gain. Do not let us incur sacrifices for which the object, when gained, will be no sufficient compensation. To rebut a slander is certainly desirable, but there are many ways of effecting it. The one which you chose, my dear son, was of very doubtful issue, and involved the liability of a sacrifice, for which

no success could have compensated. I am glad to find my character vindicated; but I cannot look back without a shudder at the peril through which that purpose was effected. Consider how much dearer, how much more valuable, you are, and ought to be to me, than mere popular estimation. Your loss could not have been repaid, even if the public had decreed me a statue of gold. But you acted to save my honour, and our honour, we are told, should be dearer than our life."

"And should it not?"

"Perhaps it should; but think first what you mean by your honour, and do not let us confound the shadow with the substance. Is there no difference between commiting a dishonourable action, and being unjustly charged with one? Is there any moral guilt in being slandered?—Is there any moral obligation to clear one's-self at all hazards? There are too many, Herbert, who lose sight of these distinctions—who live only on public opinion, and are so accustomed to estimate their own conduct by its effect upon others, that they can scarcely imagine any difference between being honourable, and being thought so. I do not mean to say that the desire of approbation is not an estimable, or, I would rather say, a useful feeling: if not quite a virtue, it is the guarantee of many, and society owes much that is valuable to its existence; but it is a sentiment to which, perhaps, in consideration of its great results, we are apt to attach rather an undue importance. I do not wish entirely to convert you, Herbert; I do not wish to make you quite as regardless of the opinion of the world as I am myself, for, perhaps, I have fallen into the opposite extreme. I was always rather careless of what others thought and said of me, and it is a fault which increases with age. At your time of life, to be solicitous, even to excess,

of the approbation of others, is the better excess of the two. Do not think that I disapprove of this sentiment—in you I know it is the parent of much that is generous and noble; but there is no subject upon which more romantic and specious declamation has been uttered, and of a kind very captivating to young imaginations; and it can do you no harm to hear this opposed by a few plain opinions, from one whose enthusiasm has been cooled by sixty winters."

Mr. Morton's full recantation, together with the representations of Sackville, who wished to stifle all inquiry, prevented Sir William Lacy from examining very narrowly into the origin of the mistake from which the injurious charge had arisen. Sackville, who possessed, to admiration, the art of leading others into an opinion, without seeming directly to advise them, instilled into the minds of both parties a feeling that it was more generous and decorous to apologize, and forgive and forget, than to enter into a scrupulous investigation of the facts which had led either of them into error. In the slight inquiry which did take place the weight of the blame was made to rest upon Allen; but so dexterous an obscurity and confusion was thrown over the whole case, that the parties, were soon glad to take refuge in a general assumption of the thing to be proved, from the tedious intricacies of its development.

Let us turn for a moment to Agnes Morton, than whom none can be supposed to have felt a more intense interest in the singular transactions of these two days. Her situation would have been agonizing indeed, had she been all along conscious of that which was to happen; but she had remained in fortunate ignorance—not, indeed, of the violence of her father's ill-will towards the Lacys, but of the latter excesses into which it had

led him. The knowledge of this part of the history came upon her after the termination of the duel; but it was so carefully broken to her, and all the more gratifying circumstance of the reconciliation, and of Lacy's state of safety, were so judiciously brought foremost to her knowledge, that the grief and anxiety which she otherwise would have felt, were in a great measure removed. She could no longer wish for the society of Lacy; indeed it was a trial from which she rather desired to be exempt; yet still it was a satisfaction to her to find that no enmity separated the families.

What she found most painful was the necessity of disguising the interest she took in the progress of Lacy's recovery, particularly when in the presence of Sackville, who was the usual channel of information respecting him. Strong as was her resolution to forswear her unfortunate attachment, and think only on her present engagement, she almost wished, at times, that this resolution would be confirmed in her by an engagement on the part of Lacy; and that she might be encouraged, even by his example, to forget what had once been their mutual feelings. This melancholy wish, had soon a prospect of being accomplished to its fullest extent.

CHAPTER VII.

It many times falls out that we deem ourselves much deceived in others, because we first deceived ourselves.

Sir Philip Sidney.

That good often springs out of evil has, from time immemorial, been the just observation of many philosophers; and Lady Lacy, though very widely removed from a philosopher, was disposed to be of the same opinion, when she saw that the unfortunate circumstance of her son's wound had the happy effect of furthering the desired union between him and Charlotte Hartley. It had been settled by her, at the time of Herbert's removal to Lacy Park, that as he was fond of society, and could not now stir from home to obtain it, it would be more agreeable for him if their family party were a little augmented. Emily and her husband were therefore desired to come and stay at Lacy; and as their sister was then with them, what so natural as that she should be invited too? Lady Lacy did not scruple to impart to Mrs. Hartley her wish that Charlotte and Herbert should be thrown a little together; and that Lady, who was cautious of offering any opposition on this point, or of questioning the desirableness of the object, gave her entire concurrence.

Having gained this point, Lady Lacy confidently anticipated the success that was to follow, and complacently reviewed all the favourable circum-

stances that were infallibly to lead to it. Herbert would not be able to stir, much from the house, or absent himself from Miss Hartley's society. His situation too was a very interesting one; and if Charlotte had a grain of proper sensibility, how could she fail to fall in love with him? Of course she must—and, assuming this to be the case, if Herbert had a grain of gratitude, how could he fail to be equally enamoured in his turn?

This reasoning seemed very satisfactory; but Lady Lacy had, for the support of her conclusions, something more than probabilities. She could also build upon the occurrence of favourable circumstances which had already fallen under her own observation. Of these, foremost in importance was the fact of Miss Hartley's fainting, when she first came to the knowledge of Herbert's disaster.—This, to Lady Lacy, seemed conclusive—an unequivocal proof of ardent attachment. To all attempts to attribute it to sudden fright, she was perfectly inaccessible. She knew it was something more, and could soon remember a great many instances in which Miss Hartley had been suddenly frightened, and had not fainted. She had been alone in a room with a mouse, and in a summer-house with two toads. She had been overturned in a pony-carriage, and once very nearly thrown from her horse—and in none of those instances had she fainted;—therefore, fright alone could not make her faint. And then followed the important corollary, that nothing but all-powerful love could cause so violent an emotion.

Herbert thought otherwise—perhaps, in a great measure, because he hoped so. He had every wish to retard the discovery of Miss Hartley's attachment to him; and the consciousness of this wish made him sometimes fear that he was guilty of perverse blindness in giving so little importance to

those indications which had struck others so forcibly. It was not merely the opinion of Lady Lacy —his sister was also of the same way of thinking. Hartley, though he alluded to it very slightly, always seemed to treat it as a matter of course; and there was something in the manner, and, occasionally, in the words of Sackville, who was now a frequent visiter, which showed that he also entertained a similar belief.

Nor was this the only force that arrayed itself against his solitary hopes and opinions. Mrs. Poole, who came to spend a few days at Lacy Park, also contributed her mite of intelligent looks and ambiguous speeches; and though last, not least in the lists was Luscombe. This gentleman, ever since the duel, had taken a great interest in the situation of Lacy, had called repeatedly to inquire after him, and had shown such an earnest desire to make himself useful and agreeable, that Lacy, though he had not previously liked the man, whom he regarded as a mere parasite, could not help being won by his attentions.

These attentions soon produced, what Luscombe doubtless expected, an invitation to stay at Lacy Park. The invitation was accepted; and as its term was undefined, Sir William and his lady were favoured with his company for a much longer time than they had originally contemplated. He, however, made himself a pleasant inmate; for, being accustomed to spend at least nine-tenths of his time in other people's houses, he had become habitually dexterous in the act of paying for his reception in the small coin of little attentions; and that person must have been very impracticable, with whom, he could not have discovered some mode of ingratiating himself.

Luscombe afforded Herbert a further confirmation of the truth of that which he had gathered

from the hints and looks of the rest of the party. It was insinuated to him in all tones, the bantering, the serious, the lively, and the confidential; and as Luscombe appeared to Herbert to have taken a very just estimate of the qualities and capacity of Miss Hartley whom he evidently did not admire, there arose a presumption that his observation might have been equally accurate upon this other point. Lacy, however, was quite satisfied with his confirmation of the unwelcome truth, without his endeavouring to promote it, which it seemed that, out of his great friendship, he was rather disposed to do.

On entering the drawing-room, one day, Herbert found Luscombe and Miss Hartley *tête-à-tête*, standing together near the fire, and apparently earnestly engaged in conversation. As he entered the dialogue suddenly ceased. Miss Hartley turned away her head, blushed, seemed hurried, and soon left the room. Luscombe also coloured slightly, and appeared for a moment ill at ease; but his usual smiling composure soon returned, and was perfectly re-established by the time that Miss Hartley had departed.

"We were talking about you," said he to Lacy, with a good humoured look of significance. "I was saying I thought you looked much better, and she said indeed she thought you did. She seemed very anxious about you: she asked me how long people generally were in recovering from a wound with a bullet, and I told her that it depended entirely upon the nature of the wound, and a variety of circumstances."

"In short you proved her question to be a silly one, and she was blushing at your reproof."

"No, it was not exactly so. Just when you came in I was joking with her about a picture. We had found a head that she admired, and she

pretended not to see that there was any likeness in it to you, and so I was saying—"

"My dear fellow," said Herbert, somewhat vexed, yet hardly knowing how to be angry, "pray don't treat me with the whole detail. It was perhaps more than enough to have entertained Miss Hartley with such a subject; I am sure you can find much better ones for your *tête-á-têtes* than me."

Luscombe looked distressed at the observation.

"I did not mean to hurt you," pursued Lacy. "I know what you did was well intended;" and here the conversation ceased.

Lacy was not disposed to be credulous, and he would probably have withstood all this array of looks, hints, and surmises, if he had not been still further urged onward to belief by the behaviour of Miss Hartley herself. There was an evident change in her manner: she used to be lively and thoughtless; she was now much graver in her general demeanour, and not unfrequently pensive, and abstracted. Towards him she no longer showed that almost sisterly frankness and familiarity which their long acquaintance had rendered natural. There was an additional shade of reserve, and occasionally a slight appearance of conscious flutter and agitation, for which he knew not how to account by any other supposition than the one he dreaded. He had seen her blush when he approached, and withdraw her eyes when met by his; yet his society was by no means avoided; it rather seemed to be sought, as if more agreeable to her than ever. Her conscious timidity of manner seemed to increase, at the same time that she was lingering in his presence, and daily affording him additional opportunities for a *tête-á-tête.*

On these ocasions Lacy sometimes observed that

she was considerably abstracted, and much less attentive to what he said, than to something which she seemed desirous of saying herself.

One day, when they were alone, Lacy was particularly struck by these peculiarities in her manner, and by an increased appearance of anxious abstraction. He began to talk to her, but found her too deeply engaged with her own thoughts to give him much of her attention. Thinking, therefore, that his conversation might be only an annoyance, he ceased, and taking up a book, began to read. He had not, however, been long thus engaged, when Miss Hartley, who would not attend to him before, now seemed anxious to draw him into conversation. She cast several glances at his book, but Lacy did not seem to observe her, and read on in silence.

"Is that poetry?" said she, at last, finding that looks were of no avail.

"No; humble prose," said Lacy, "and of no very amusing kind."

"You like poetry best?" said Miss Hartley, inquiringly.

"I hardly know," replied Lacy; "perhaps it does give me most pleasure at the time; but I should no more wish to read only poetry, than to live upon nothing but peaches."

"Very true," said Miss Hartley, as if she was not thinking about it; "and whose poetry is the best?"

"That is a question of mere taste, which nine persons out of ten might answer differently. To be sure, there are some few poets whom all would probably agree in classing among the first. Milton is one of them."

"Ah!—yes. Milton—he wrote Paradise Lost. What a pity it is that Paradise Lost is so shocking!"

"Do you think it shocking?" replied Lacy, with a smile.

"Yes; it is all about—devils," said she, lowering her voice at the last word, as if she thought it hardly a proper one.

"Nay; not all," said Lacy. "There is something about angels, too."

"Is there? well I read almost two whole *cantos*, and it seemed to be all about devils. I was told it was quite a proper book, but I did not like to go on with it. It is not the sort of reading I prefer."

"And what sort do you prefer?" said Lacy, who anticipated some amusement from her opinions.

"Oh dear! I hardly know how to tell you;—yes, I think I like poetry that has more heart and feeling in it, and seems more natural and simple, and comes more home to one, and describes thoughts, and ideas, and situations that might happen to be one's own."

"Like those in the Corsair and the Bride of Abydos?" said Lacy, casting his eyes upon a volume of Byron which lay on the table.

"Yes; that sort of thing," she answered, very innocently, and with rather a hurried air, took up the book, as if in the hope that it would help her to arrange her thoughts. "Ay, it is all very beautiful," she continued, after she had turned over the leaves, abstractedly, for a few moments; "but that is not what I wanted to talk to you about."

"Whatever it may be, I am all attention," said Lacy.

"Are you? Ah! but now don't look so, and put on that sort of smile, as if you thought it was to be something amusing; indeed, I am going to be serious."

"And so am I; but you must give me time."

A short period of silence followed, which seemed to be employed by Miss Hartley in considering what she should say, as it was by Lacy in ruminating upon the singularity of her manner. She had, apparently, something to communicate, that she found a great difficulty in uttering, and she had been endeavouring to lead to it gradually and indirectly, and to gain courage by talking, till she could at length glide, without effort, into the midst of her agitating communication. This attempt had failed, and the Genius of Poetry, though so ably invoked, had refused to assist her. Apparently, however, she could find no aid in any other quarter, for, after a short consideration, she returned to her former topic.

"We were talking," said she "about poetry, and you asked me what kind I preferred; and I told you I liked that which had most feeling in it. Now, I dare say, you wonder at my taste, but the the reason why I like that kind is, because I think it teaches one to know one's own sentiments, and—and to describe them—and—and that is so difficult!" As she said this, she blushed and uttered a very gentle sigh.

"Excuse me if I differ from you," said Lacy, rather surprised at the course which the conversation was taking; "but I think that poetry of a highly-coloured and romantic class, indeed I may almost say, poetry in general, is rather likely to cause one to mistake the nature of one's sentiments, than to improve the knowledge of them; and, as for describing them, I question whether the expressions of a poet, however natural, and just, and forcible, are ever such as one should use in speak- of one's feelings to another, or even in writing to a friend."

"Very true; I dare say you are right, and that is what makes it so difficult, for us especially;

there are so many things that women cannot say."

"Undoubtedly," replied Lacy, with increasing surprise; "there are many things which they cannot say—which they ought not to say."

"Ought not—ay, that is what perplexes one.—Do you think," she added, hesitatingly, and with greater agitation of manner, "that it can ever be proper and allowable for women to express themselves—I mean—I hardly know how to ask you—may they ever speak upon such a subject as their—their affections?"

She coloured and hung down her head as she uttered these words, and Lacy was scarcely less embarrassed.

"Strange!" thought he, "what can this tend to? Surely she will not make me a declaration of love!"

The import of her words, when he took into consideration all that he had been told of the state of her feelings, seemed to contenance this supposition; and Lacy, with all his curiosity, was by no means anxious for such an éclaircissement. "Really," said he, "I feel very incapable of answering you; I should be rather presumptuous if I made myself a judge of the niceties of female conduct. I am sure you are more able to solve these difficulties than I can be. My opinion would not be worth your having."

"Oh, I am sure your opinion is always very valuable to me."

"You do it too much honour to say so: it will always be at your service, when it can be of any avail. I am afraid," he added, forcing a smile, "in this instance, you would not find it of much use: I don't pique myself upon being a good casuist upon any point, especially upon one that does not rightfully belong to me.

Lacy then changed the topic, and prevented all chance of a recurrence to the former one, by speedily quitting her presence.

Lacy was perplexed and annoyed by the past interview; it removed the last veil of doubt which, thin, as it was, had still comforted him with some show of uncertainty with respect to Miss Hartley's unfortunate attachment. But now the fact was ascertained, and how was he to meet it? He could not requite her affections; he could not fly her presence; he could not bear to blight her passion by unkindness.

In this state of perplexity he was accosted by his mother, who was glorying in that same conviction, which was causing such torment to her unhappy son.

"Well, Herbert, where is Charlotte?" were Lady Lacy's first words.

"The eternal subject!" murmured Herbert, despondingly; "I don't know, Ma'am," he answered, drily.

"Don't know! Ah, Herbert, what would Charlotte have said, if I had asked her where you were?"

"I really cannot pretend to say," replied he rather irritably; "pray don't expect me to answer for Miss Hartley?"

"Well, I won't; but now don't look so angry, especially as you are talking about poor Charlotte. I am afraid you are unkind to her."

"Unkind! my dear mother, never! at least I am sure if I have, it has been quite unintentionally—I always wished to show her every possible civility."

"Ay, ay! but that won't do—it is past civility—you must show a great deal more now; indeed you must."

"Must!—ma'am, why?"

"Oh, I am confident you must. You know you cannot draw back—if people raise expectations, they ought to satisfy them."

"Undoubtedly, *if* they raise them—but I—"

"Oh yes, indeed you have raised them; at times you have been very attentive, and in public too, which made it more marked: you were so during the races—I don't remember whether or not at the Westcourt ball—you did not seem well at that Westcourt ball; but at the race ball, I noticed particularly, you were very attentive to her, and she looked so happy, poor thing!"

"I am very sorry, ma'am,—"

"Sorry! that she was happy?"

"Yes—if it arose from a delusion."

"Delusion, my dear Herbert! it is all delusion when people are in love."

"I believe it is, too often," said Herbert, whose thoughts returned to his own disappointment.

"Oh, yes; but now, Herbert, I cannot think it would be right in you to do every thing you can to gain the poor thing's affections, and then to turn your back upon her.

"Ma'am, I assure you, I have no such uncivil intentions; but I really don't know what is the every-thing that I have done to gain Miss Hartley's affections."

"Oh, Herbert, many things—I cannot describe them—but it was your manner, my dear, your manner. Others saw it as well as me, particularly at that ball: you know you danced with her twice, and you talked to her a great deal, and now you are always with her; and you have been wounded; and, what with one thing or another, I don't wonder that it turns out as it has: you know I always said I thought she liked you."

No more was said at the time, but Herbert thought long and anxiously on the subject.

"Fool that I have been!" said he to himself, in the bitterness of self-reproach, "to have been so blind to my own conduct; so little conscious of what I was doing. It seems then, that I have ensnared against my will, the affections of a person whose attachment I can never return, and I have done this so pointedly, that my conduct and its tendency were visible to many. I remember that fatal ball. I was galled by the coldness of one whom I ought to have avoided, instead of courting her attention, like a madman as I was. I ought to have profited by her noble example; but I was piqued and irritated, and tried to cover my chagrin under false gaiety and attention to others; and *then* I raised false expectations—yes, it is fit it should have been *then*. It was a moment of shameful folly and forgetfulness, and it has brought its just and bitter consequences. I have deceived Charlotte Hartley, and I must repair the wrong: my hand is all that I can give, and I will give it. I can never feel any love for her; but I will be very kind to her, and—I must forget Agnes, if I can."

CHAPTER VIII.

Your virtues, gentle master,
Are sanctified and holy traitors to you.
As You Like It.

In this state of mind, he sought the counsel of his sister, whom he wished to make the depository of his sorrows, and perhaps the medium of his intended sacrifice. He found her a willing confidant; indeed, she was secretly a joyful one; she found that the important moment had arrived, and that it only remained for her to strike the blow that was to crown her plans with success.

She listened to Herbert's communication with much appearance of affectionate interest.

"My dear brother," said she, when he had ended, "I sincerely regret the unfortunate course which circumstances have taken; nor do I entertain the slightest doubt that they are as we fear.—It is as certain that Charlotte is attached to you, as that you are not attached to her. I am afraid too, that it is equally certain, that you (though unintentionally) have encouraged that attachment; indeed you are conscious of it yourself: your own honourable feelings have already dictated the only ample reparation."

"Yes," said Lacy, mournfully, "I know the sacrifice that I ought to make, and I now wish to ask you to be the bearer of my proposals. I know it is a singular request; but I cannot play the suitor

myself: I should only distress her by my coldness, and betray the secret of my real indifference. Will you grant me this favour?"

His sister hesitated. "I would willingly do this, and more for you," said she; "but let us first be certain that it is necessary. Herbert, I may safely say to you that I like this match almost as little as you do yourself. I should wish to see you married, but not to Charlotte. I will say it, though she is my husband's sister. She is a good girl, and I dare say would prove an amiable and comfortable wife; but she is not such to *you*. There is too great a difference in your minds; they would have nothing in common—in fact I know you despise her."

"'Despise' is a harsh word."

"Yes, but no the less true. Let us be honest—it is no time, my dear brother, for me to be picking phrases when your happiness is at stake. Yours and Charlotte's would be an unequal marriage, and I am sure that all such marriages are more or less productive of unhappiness, whatever the inequality be—whether of age, rank, fortune, or mind. You could never make a companion of Charlotte, nor could she appreciate you as you deserve.—There would be little communion or confidence, and without confidence a married life must be one of misery."

"I see it, and feel it bitterly," said Herbert, in a tone of despair; "but pray spare me this prospect, unless you can do any thing to remedy the evil."

"I trust I can. I should not have spoken unless I had some hopes of assisting you. With every wish that you should do what is right, I cannot think that an immediate offer of marriage is necessary. Charlotte is certainly much attached to you; but she is of such a disposition that I think

she would be quite satisfied with a continuance of the brotherly and sisterly footing on which you now associate, if she could be assured that it was lasting, and that she should not be supplanted by any one else. She has a very reasonable diffidence in her power of fixing your affections, and a considerable jealousy of disposition; and I think if this was appeased by any declaration on your part —by an engagement, let us say—by a proposal of marriage at some distant, unspecified period—I, think there would then be some ground for hope that in time her attachment would be so far cooled, that you might withdraw yourself with perfect ease, and without any violence to her feelings."

Herbert's countenance alternately brightened and clouded over at this proposal.

"If you tell me," said he, "that such an engagement would be satisfactory to Miss Hartley, I am sure I can believe you, for I do not think you would speak without sufficient grounds; and I am sure that any such postponement will be a great relief to me: but I do not know how I can frame such a proposal. How can I seem at once anxious and reluctant—to wish the marriage, and not to wish it?"

"Leave that to me. You know you have asked me to bear your proposals, and I have undertaken the office. There are no difficulties of any moment."

"But," said Herbert, "I don't quite like the idea of making an engagement which is not to be fulfilled. It seems deceitful."

"My dear Herbert, you deceive yourself. It is to be fulfilled—provisionally—it is to be fulfilled at some future time, in case that she should still continue to testify the same feelings. I cannot for an instant suppose that you have any intention of withdrawing from your contract, or that you

would scruple to fulfil it, if you saw that nothing less sufficed to satisfy her mind."

"You do me no more than justice," replied Herbert.

"Of that I am sure," said his sister. "But if you wish to put the proposal upon a different footing, I think I can arrange it, so as to spare you the pain of feeling that the marriage is deferred solely by yourself. I will say generally that you wish to consider yourself engaged to Charlotte until she may choose to dissolve the engagement. Yes, yes, it shall be so. I am sure *that* will be satisfactory. Nay, it will show even more consideration for her, by placing the liberty of retracting solely in her power. It will effectually relieve her from the dread of being supplanted by any one else, and that, to her timid mind, is the chief source of anxiety. The engagement will subsist for a while, till at last it is quietly dissolved, without surprise or sorrow to either of you. As for the delay of your marriage, there will be nothing in that to excite astonishment, or require explanation. Marriages are constantly deferred, without any but the parties concerned knowing why. Law and a thousand family arrangements may intervene to delay a marriage, and who knows the particulars or would even have the patience to hear them? No—the fact of an engagement is all that the gossiping public care about. The time is comparatively immaterial. But I must perform my mission while it is fresh in my mind. Farewell for the present: you shall soon hear the result of my negotiations."

That result he soon heard, and he was told that it was very satisfactory; that Miss Hartley had received the communication with all proper blushing confusion, and that though she had said little to the purpose, she had looked every thing that she

ought. To Lady Lacy, the result of this long cherished affair, proved not entirely agreeable; and it required a good deal of dexterous management on the part of Mrs. Hartley to prevent her from destroying that state of neutrality in which, through her ingenuity, the parties had been placed. Neither Sir William Lacy nor Charles Hartley contributed any visible influence. The former refused to give any attention to the subject, merely saying that Herbert might act precisely as he felt inclined. As for the latter, he was quite contented to adopt, without inquiry, any opinion his lady might express.

Mrs. Hartley reviewed the circumstances with all the complacency of a successful plotter. She had succeeded in fixing upon her brother and sister-in-law, a yoke which she trusted might keep them long unmarried. She could not feel any certainty of the long continuance of the present safeguard; but it was something gained; and let it only exist for a few years, and she trusted that such habits of celibacy would be formed as it would be no very difficult matter to perpetuate. Let them only remain single, and their fortunes, at their death, would centre in her children: at least she had every reason to hope that, with proper management, such might be the result. One of the two, she flattered herself, could hardly escape her toils. She was most anxious about her brother, for Charlotte's fortune was small in comparison with his expectations, and she felt that over him she possessed a very limited control.

Notwithstanding her pretences, she was by no means convinced that Charlotte was attached to Herbert, and she felt that she was grossly deceiving him in assuming that conviction. The cruelty of the imposition which she had practised, and the engagement into which she had led him, also struck

her with a momentary pang. But she tried to stifle these upbraidings of her conscience, by a false persuasion of duty. "If it is an injury to some," said she to herself, "it is for the benefit of others, that are still dearer to me. I do it for the good of my children. Surely their welfare should be the first object of a mother."

This was mere sophistry, and she knew it—yet it seemed to afford some satisfaction. To whom is sophistry not welcome in cases such as these? It is the universal panacea of guilt; and like an opiate, is greedily received as a soothing balm, by those who still know it to be poison.

CHAPTER IX.

A popular license is indeed the many-headed tyrant.
SIR PHILIP SIDNEY.

THREE months now passed without the occurrence of any event that tended to produce a material alteration in the situation of the parties already mentioned. The engagements of Agnes to Sackville, and of Lacy to Miss Hartley, still continued in undiminished force. The only changes that did take place, were slow and progressive. Lacy gradually regained his strength, Sackville's visits became less frequent, Mr. Morton suspended his inquiries, and the intercourse between the families at Lacy and Dodswell, seemed likely to become as cold and slight as it had been before.

Mr. Morton's manner had received an unfortunate change. He was out of spirits, and was grave and more than usually irritable, and seemed to have been soured by adverse circumstances. Some traced these appearances to the duel; while others, with more truth, hinted at the possible derangement of his affairs. This latter opinion, however, was not justified by any alteration in his state of living, or the retrenchment of previous expenses. It was rather to be collected from the uneasiness and impatience which he occasionally manifested, when any word was dropped in his presence, that had a reference to expenditure or retrenchment, and the anxious look with which he seemed to in-

quire, whether any thing contained in the expression was levelled at him.

It was about four months after the duel, and early in the ensuing year, that the public were informed of the sudden death of one of the representatives of the borough of Wichcombe. Wichcombe was a close borough, the nomination to which was shared by Lord Rodborough, with a wealthy commoner. The gentleman who died, had been Lord Rodborough's nominee; and his sudden decease, which Lord Rodborough protested to be very inconvenient, reduced him to the immediate necessity of looking out for some other person to fill that situation. His two sons were already in parliament, and so were most of his relations; and, after much consideration, he could think of no person so apparently eligible to such a post as Mr. Morton. He could not hope that he would be quite so subservient as the late member, who, having no sort of political opinion himself, implicitly followed every hint of his patron: but Mr. Morton was the father-in-law of Lord Malvern, and a man well known to the world; and was a very natural, and respectable object of choice.

The proposal was made, and, as it was dexterously done, in a manner flattering to Mr. Morton's pride, he readily acceded to it. Perhaps it would be unfair to inquire whether he was actuated by the prospect of obtaining the personal security afforded by the privilege of parliament. The question of expenses was afterwards to be discussed; and it was treated by Mr. Morton with an affected carelessness, and an impatience, which did not escape the keen observation of Lord Rodborough's agent. He was probably induced to take advantage of it, for he proposed and obtained the singular conditions, that though the whole of the slight expenses of an uncontested election should be borne

by Lord Rodborough, yet that in the event of a contest, he should contribute only a half, and that the remainder should be borne by Mr. Morton.

However, as no contest was then in prospect, it seemed as if such an agreement might be made with perfect safety ; and Mr. Morton, having once consented to stand for the borough, did not like to retract upon a mere point of expense. Whether the truth was known to the agent of Lord Rodborough, is more than we can venture to say; but certainly at that time, a contest was more than merely probable. The late member, though enjoying a reasonable share of personal popularity, had excited discontent, by his maintenance of principles which were at variance with those of the majority of his constituents; and as his principles (if they might be so called) were known to be precisely those of Lord Rodborough, it was to be apprehended that the same were to be looked for in any fresh member of his appointment. Many of the burgesses had expressed considerable discontent at the state of thraldom in which they were held, and the present vacancy was thought a desirable opportunity for ascerting their rights to the liberty of choosing for themselves.

The result of their deliberations, was a determination to seek immediately a champion for their cause; and on the day following Mr. Morton's acceptance of the proposals of Lord Rodborough, a deputation was on its way to Lacy Park, for the object of inviting either Sir William or his son to undertake the representation of the Borough of Wichcombe, and holding out, at the same time, flattering prospects of easy success. The result of the negociations between Lord Rodborough and Mr. Morton, was not, at that time, made known, nor had the little *fronde* of non conforming burgesses, made any formal signification of

their measures previous to that very day. Sir William Lacy and his son, were, therefore, in complete ignorance of the part undertaken by Mr. Morton.

For himself, Sir William declined the offer of the burgesses, but expressed a wish that his son might be accepted in his stead; and Herbert, in accordance with the wishes both of his father and of the deputation, consented to undertake the charge. His sentiments coincided with those of his inviters, and he felt that he could, with honour and consistency, become their representative. With every proper feeling of humility, he was also conscious that he had sufficient talent to do justice to their confidence, and to obtain some credit to himself; and he possessed that energy of character, which rendered the prospect of honourable exertion rather agreeable, than unpleasing to him. In politics he was not a bigot or an enthusiast. He was neither an humble worshipper of power, nor a heated admirer of the principles of republicanism. He was liberal in the truest sense, for he was willing to find, in every system, some admixture of good; and, with all proper abhorrence of that which was faulty, he was, fortunately, exempt from that angry intolerance with which the profession of liberality is too often accompanied.

The printed addresses of Lacy and Mr. Morton came out on the same day. They contained little more than a brief expression of the hopes and intentions of the respective candidates, and scarcely entered into any exposition of their political sentiments. It soon, however, came to be understood that little diversity would exist between them, except on one question—that of Catholic Emancipation. Lacy was known to be favourable to it; Mr. Morton, as the nominee

of Lord Rodborough, was concluded to be adverse.

Much surprise, and some feeling of repugnance and regret, were testified by each of the candidates, on finding to whom they were to be opposed. They felt that they were unpleasantly situated; and that their present opposition coming so soon after their duel, and being their first public act that succeeded it, would seem to argue a degree of confirmed hostility, which they were, each of them, far from entertaining. It may easily be imagined, that Lacy was sensibly grieved at the prospect of further dissension with the father of Agnes; nor was Mr. Morton altogether without some compunctious visitings, on finding himself again the opponent of one whom he felt that he had injured.

But neither of them could now contract. Mr. Morton was pledged to Lord Rodborough, and Lacy to the Wichcombe burgesses; and, though he could perhaps have convinced them privately of the propriety of his wishes for retiring, he had no such plea as he could safely publish to the world, or which would not be exposed to malicious and discreditable interpretations. He wrote a short and amicable letter to Mr. Morton, declaring his entire freedom from all remains of hostile feeling; his ignorance of the fact of having him for an opponent, until he was pledged beyond possibility of receding; and his hope, that the situation in which they were now placed, would be attended with no unfavourable change of sentiment.

The answer from Mr. Morton was expressed in handsome terms, and was quite satisfactory to the feelings of Lacy; and here their communication ceased, each being sensible that they had a duty to fulfil towards their supporters, which forbade

them to excite in their minds the suspicion of a collusive intercourse, and of any disposition to secret coalition, and to a barter of the public duty which they had undertaken at the shrine of their own private friendship. The canvass was commenced, and as the number of electors was small, it was soon completed; and each candidate, strong in promises of support which seemed to ensure to each a majority, calmly awaited the opening of the contest.

At length, the day of nomination arrived. The show of hands was pronounced to be in favour of Mr. Morton, and Lacy immediately demanded a poll. The poll was opened, and the modern Saturnalia began.

An election is a spectacle calculated to inspire an Englishman at once with pride and shame. For the entertainment of feelings of shame and disgust, there is assuredly ample ground. The rancour, the prejudice, the corruption, the hypocrisy, the most open venality disgustingly coupled with an affectation of principle and public spirit, and the exercise of a legal right brought into immediate connection with an unblushing breach of the established law—these are among the many traits that justify such an unfavourable feeling. But there is also much wherein to exult, not only in contemplating the constitutional advantages and the dissemination of general confidence which must result from the exercise of such a right, but in considering that however great may be the disorders which accompany it, and seem almost to neutralize its benefits, those disorders can be safely permitted; that there is a vigorous elasticity in the organization of the system which enables it to regain its course unhurt; that the apparently disunited links of the great chain which extends in nice gradation from the beggar to the monarch, are re-

stored unbroken to their original connection; and that when the tumult has subsided, not a particle is found to have been dissolved of that finest fabric of human society that the world has ever seen.

The contest was attended with most of the circumstances by which contests are generally characterized. Processions, swelled by a rabble who had no other means of taking a part in the election than by increasing its riot, paraded the streets in rival parties, bearing colours and flags, and headed by discordant bands of tipsy musicians. "Lacy and Independence," was the rallying cry of one party; and "Morton and Constitution," "Church and King," and "No Popery," were the watch-words of the other; and by dint of these, and the united flow of all the tap-rooms in Wichcombe, they were animated into a spirit of contentious valour which called more than once for the interposition of the authorities of the place.

The danger of a broken head did not extend, as is sometimes the case, to the candidates themselves; but they could not, of course, escape the usual infliction of election squibs. Bibs, leading-strings, and horn-books were exhibited in derision of Lacy's youth; and "Old iron to sell!" was the annoying cry which frequently greeted the appearance of Mr. Morton. It had been the aim of each candidate, and particularly of Lacy, to avoid every symptom of personal hostility, and soften by a show of courtesy in public the menacing appearance of their respective positions. It therefore became to him a matter of no slight uneasiness, when he found that his supporters were but too ready to attribute to him all the coarse rancour which they were pleased to exhibit towards those of the opposite party, and that they indulged in broad public allusions to the circumstances of the duel. So interesting a fact, when once adverted to, was

not likely to be allowed to slumber. Some pugnacious spirits began to flatter themselves with a hope of the contest being graced with the *éclat* of of another meeting. The genius of poetry presently lent its aid; and on the third morning of the poll, rival ballad-singers were chaunting in dogged rhyme their perverted accounts of the duel of the candidates.

Under these unpleasant circumstances did Lacy meet his opponent on the hustings on the third morning of the poll. He knew not in what respect Mr. Morton was affected by the expressions of the populace, but he thought there was something more than usually chafed and haughty in his manner. This, however, could make no alteration in the sentiments of Lacy, or in the line which he meant to pursue. He felt that he owed him no further explanation, but that whatever he might say respecting their mutual situation, should be addressed less to him than to the public. He felt that some correction of their erroneous opinions was desirable; and, accordingly after a few remarks upon the state of the poll, and some political topics which had been previously adverted to, he proceeded to address them as follows:—

"And now, gentlemen, allow me to turn for a few moments to circumstances of a private nature, circumstances which concern not only myself, but my honorable opponent also; and which I should therefore not feel justified in publicly mentioning if they had not already, and in a manner painful to my feelings, and doubtless to his, been obtruded upon your notice. I allude, gentlemen, to the hostility which at one time existed between Mr. Morton and myself. I have seen with pain that an impression is prevalent that it still exists; and I now address you in the hope of removing that impression, by distinctly assuring you that all such hostility

has ceased. It ceased from the moment of our meeting; in me it has never been renewed, and I have the pleasure of thinking that no returning spark of it has actuated any part of the subsequent conduct of my honourable opponent.

"I am unwilling, gentlemen, that any one here present should think so meanly of me as to suppose that feelings of private resentment can enter into the motives of my present course. When I first aspired to the honour of being your representative, it was in the perfect ignorance of who my opponent might be, or whether any would present himself. I undertook the charge in the conviction that you had a right to contend for an independent vehicle of your sentiments; and I feel that I should be disgracing that good cause, if I were to admit the unworthy influence of private pique.

"Mr. Morton hears me, but I address this avowal solely to you. That gentleman, I am well persuaded, stands in no need of such an explanation. My sentiments are already known to him, and it is in his power to corroborate my present statement. I am confident that our private feelings are and will be as strictly amicable as our public conduct will be that of honour; and in the assurance of this, and in the presence of you all, I here offer him my hand."

Loud acclamations followed the close of this address. Mr. Morton took the proffered hand, and in a frank and cordial manner briefly expressed his entire approval and unqualified confirmation of Lacy's words. Mr. Morton then repaired from the hustings to a dinner, attended by most of the principal electors. He was in good spirits in spite of the unpromising results of the poll, cheered apparently by the manly and amicable declaration of his opponent, with whom the appearance of a returning state of hostility had begun to weigh heavy on his mind.

The sitting was long and jovial; all where of one party and of one mind; and as there was nobody present to contradict any of their assertions, they soon found themselves in a condition to talk their opponents out of every possible chance of success. Healths were drunk, and thanks returned, and a profusion of high-sounding truisms were the customary result.

In the midst of this joyous career, when the uproar of a "Three times three" had nearly subsided, and the glasses were still jingling on the table, a servant entered and put a small note into the hand of Mr. Morton. He opened it carelessly, but no sooner had he cast his eyes upon the contents than he turned pale, his lips quivered, his hand trembled, and he sat the picture of embarrassment and dismay. In another moment he had torn it, and thrown it into the fire, replied only with a glance of anger to the "No bad news, I hope, Sir?" of an honest burgess near him, whispered to the gentleman at his side a request that he would take his place, and then, after a scarcely articulate apology for leaving the company, he rose and hastily quitted the room. A dead silence followed his departure, and curiosity and consternation were painted in the countenances of all present. At length curiosity so far triumphed as to induce them to commission one of their number to make inquiries, and to see Mr. Morton, if possible. He returned with the information that Mr. Morton was writing, and would not be disturbed. They soon learnt that a messenger was despatched to Lord Rodborough, and shortly afterwards, that Mr. Morton himself was on his way to Dodswell.

CHAPTER X.

> That which gilded o'er his imperfections
> Is wasted and consumed, even like ice,
> Which, by the vehemence of heat, dissolves
> And glides to many rivers; so his wealth
> That felt a prodigal hand, hot in expense,
> Melted within his gripe, and from his coffers
> Ran, like a violent stream, to other men's.
>
> COOKE.—*Greens's Tu Quoque.*

WE shall now transfer our readers to Dodswell, and prepare them, by a recital of previous circumstances, for the arrival of Mr. Morton. The only persons then at Dodswell were Lady Louisa, Agnes, and her younger sister Marianne; Lord and Lady Malvern were visiting in another county, and Sackville, fifty miles off, at his own place.—Mr. Morton, since the opening of the poll, had been staying at Wichcombe, from whence he had transmitted to his family daily accounts of the progress of the election. Lady Louisa was as much interested as she could be with any thing beyond the imaginary vicissitudes of her own tardy convalescence, and could but little sympathize with the anxiety of Agnes, who paid an earnest attention to the contest, and saw, in the present opposition of her father and Lacy, continual grounds for apprehension.

It was in the afternoon of the day on which we have seen Mr. Morton so abruptly quit the com-

pany of his supporters, that Agnes was sitttng alone at Dodswell, in a room, the projecting window of which, commanded a view of the shrubbery, and of a private door which led to it from the house. The short winter's day was drawing to a close, and as the shades began to darken, she looked out with a corresponding spirit of gloom at the cheerless prospect. In so doing, she observed three men of ordinary appearance, enveloped in great coats, and with riding whips in their hands, pass along the shrubbery walk, and after looking about them for a moment, enter at the private door. She was struck with the unusual unceremoniousness of their mode of entrance, but knowing that electors, in the time of a contest, are apt to dispense with ordinary rules, she immediately conceived them to be three of the independent burgesses, who were bent upon showing their attachment to liberty and their candidate, by making his house their own. Under this persuasion, and anxious to receive the latest accounts of the progress of the election, she rang, and desired to know what report the persons who had just arrived had brought from Wichcombe. It was long before the servant returned with an answer to this inquiry, and when he did come, it was evident by his mysterious looks and troubled manner, that he was not the bearer of agreeable tidings.

He said they were not from Wichcombe; he could not pretend to say exactly from whence they came; he could not be quite sure whether they wanted his master; he hoped not, but he supposed they would stay till he returned.

"This is very strange," thought Agnes, struck both by the words and manner of the speaker, and feeling her apprehensions rapidly increase. "Something unpleasant has happened," said she to the servant, "and you do not like to inform me of it.

Speak, boldly—I can bear to hear it. Who are these people?"

"Well, then, Ma'am, if I must speak—they are the bailiffs;" and then came out the whole truth—there was an execution in the house.

Agnes did not scream or faint, though the shock was one of the greatest she had experienced. She sat in pale, agitated silence, listening, to the information which the servant, after the removal of the first awful difficulty, was perfectly willing to give. It appeared that the writ was issued at the suit of a man, whose brother-in-law was a burgess of Wichcombe, and voted against Mr. Morton.

Informed of this, Agnes, without delay, despatched a messenger to her father, with that note which had summoned him so abruptly from the presence of his supporters. She then turned her attention to the distressing question of the course she should adopt with respect to her mother, and doubted whether she should immediately inform Lady Louisa of what had occurred, or conceal the fact till the arrival of Mr. Morton. A short consideration induced her to attempt the latter course. She dreaded the moment when the truth should be made known to her. She was aware that the shock would be more severe to Lady Louisa, than it had been to herself. She had long suspected the derangement of her father's affairs, though it was a subject on which she had never dared to speak, even to the extent of hinting at the desirableness of economy. But Lady Louisa had no such suspicions, nor would it have been easy to inspire her with them, for though not of a cheerful temperament, she had that timidity of character which induced her ever to shut her eyes to alarming truths; and her passiveness was allied rather to indolence, than to that stoical composure that would fit her to bear the blow with firmness.

The kind and judicious plans of Agnes, with a view to spare her the pain of a hasty discovery, were unhappily frustrated. She had been prematurely informed, through the babbling imprudence of her favourite attendant; and Agnes on entering her room, had the pain of seeing her sink down in a fit under the shock of the first discovery. She soon recovered her senses, and long were the distressing and unavailing lamentations which Agnes was doomed to hear; and frequent were the demands for explanations which she was not yet enabled to give. Lady Louisa, who considered it proper on so serious an occasion, to be more than usually ill, and thought herself unequal, even to the exertion of lying on a sofa, had retired early to rest, when Agnes was led to prepare for the approaching interview with her father, who, she was told, had arrived, and desired to see her in his own sitting-room.

When she entered, Mr. Morton was sitting dejectedly at a table, his face concealed by the hand on which it rested. He gave a short side glance to ascertain who it was, and then, without uttering a word, or removing the hand that shaded his eyes he extended to her the other. She took it in silence, and returned its tremulous, feverish pressure. He drew her towards him, and she rested her head upon his shoulder. It was a moment of bitter emotion, and the first tears which she had shed since she heard of this new calamity, now fell from her cheeks. He perceived them, and acknowledged, by a short and impressive embrace, this mark of her condolence, and then motioned her to sit beside him. He again took her hand, but some moments elapsed before he spoke.

"I need not tell you what has happened," were his first words, "you know all—you know that I am a beggar. I have suffered for years more than

I can describe, for the sake of maintaining appearances, and this is the end of all my labours! and at what a time has the blow fallen!—in the midst of this election! Agnes, you look as if you would fain ask me why I engaged in that election—and well may you ask me! It was the desperate plan of a ruined man to hoodwink the world; to bolster up his falling credit; to gain a fresh claim to consideration, when he felt he was losing all his former ones. It was because I could not assign the true reason for a refusal, and because I wished to deceive even myself with the *éclat* of a little false prosperity; but did I?—no, no, no—Heaven only knows what I suffered; but now I am embarked, and I must still go on, if I can get the assistance I want. I have written to Lord Rodborough—I am anxious for his answer."

Agnes looked at him earnestly, as if she wished to speak, but was almost fearful of addressing him. "I am your daughter," said she, "and I feel as if all I have ought to be yours. Under present circumstances, I can hardly wish the election to proceed; but if you feel that your honour requires it, and I can command any money—"

"Thanks, thanks, my dear child, but you cannot assist me. Even if I had the wish (which I have not) to squander your fortune on myself, I could not do it without the consent of your trustees, and that would be, and ought to be withheld. Besides they are at a distance, and immediate help is what I require."

At this moment a letter was brought in—it was the answer from Lord Rodborough. Mr. Morton eagerly took it, and began to read it aloud to his daughter. It ran thus:

"My dear Sir,—I am much surprised and concerned at the contents of your note. Whatever my suspicions might have been, I had no idea that

you were so far involved as you now confess yourself to be, and I cannot help thinking myself rather ill-used in not having been made acquainted with the state of your circumstances, when you engaged to become my nominee for Wichcombe. I like openness on many accounts, and flatter myself that I am not altogether, unworthy being trusted. You are my candidate, and your defalcation will prove very inconvenient to me, as there is now no time to engage another. I am therefore inclined to make the best of a bad bargain, and must consequently desire ——." Mr. Morton could read no longer, but tore in pieces the insulting letter and threw it into the fire.

"Insolent, selfish fool!" he exclaimed, with a countenance inflamed with indignation, "does he think me his slave? Gracious God! have I laboured for no better end than to be viewed in such a light as this? To what have I exposed myself! but I will not bear it another moment. No: Lord Rodborough's humble tool will be no longer subservient to his lordship's views—I give up the contest. Inconvenient to him! not one word of compassion for my misfortune! Pshaw! compassion! what am I thinking of? thank God he did not offer it! I am insulted enough without it."

He then sat down, and wrote a short letter. It was to the returning officer of Wichcombe, stating that he declined the contest. He then commenced another, when Agnes, who feared that her presence might be irksome to him, rose, and was about to retire. He begged her to remain, and said that he was going to write very briefly to Lord Rodborough. This intimation was fortunate; Agnes looked at his irritated countenance, and approached him with an air of mild expostulation.

"My dear father," said she, "do not think me

too bold, if I beg of you as a favour not to return an immediate answer to Lord Rodborough. You are angry with him, and very justly, but his rudeness may now appear to you deserving of a more severe notice than you may afterwards think it worthy of. He has no right to expect so immediate a reply—pray defer it till to-morrow."

Mr. Morton smiled, and pushed the paper from him. "You are quite right," said he: "I was on the point of saying what perhaps I could not have reflected on with as much pleasure as I can on this," and he laid his hand on the note that contained his resignation. He covered his eyes for a few minutes, as if engaged in thought, and then looked up with a composed and almost cheerful countenance. "How wonderful," said Mr. Morton, "are the changes of one's feelings under the trials of misfortune, and how beneficial to us oftentimes are seeming evils! You do not know the load that is taken off my mind. You could not conceive it, unless you were aware of what I have suffered during many years past—I feel like a prisoner let out of jail—I am relieved at last from the terrible yoke of supporting false appearances. Oh, my dear daughter, if your poor father has seemed too often harsh and capricious, attribute much of his waywardness to this curse that hung over him. Perhaps I ought not to plead it as an excuse, because I brought it on myself; but I am confident that many of the defects of temper, of which I am conscious, have been aggravated by my circumstances. Of all poisons to one's happiness, one of the most deadly, is a continual struggle to seem what one is not. Think what it must be to a person of honourable feelings, to be continually sensible that his whole conduct is a practical lie, and that he is endeavouring to affirm by deed, what he would scorn to utter in words—

what he could not utter without exposing himself to one of the worst insults that a man can receive —yet this I did, and still felt that I had an equal right to resist the slighest impeachment of my honour. What a mere paradox is human conduct, if one could sift it to the bottom, and see all its contradictory motives! Now, at last, I seem to understand myself. My real prosperity has long been gone I am glad the bubble is gone too—Adversity seems to have already taught me to see clearer—perhaps I may be happier for it—I certainly should if I could think that I had hitherto endangered no happiness but my own—but I know too well what I have sacrificed." His voice faltered, and he seemed to make an unavailing effort to proceed. He took his daughter's hand, pressed it to his breast, and added, in a low tone,—"I have sacrificed you."

Agnes was startled and agitated by this sudden allusion to her own situation, and, for a while, was unable to answer. "Do not think so," said she at length, "I shall always look upon Mr. Sackville as a very valuable protector; and even if I cannot feel any very strong affection for him, I ought not to repine at being in such hands as his —besides—" she suddenly checked herself, and presently added, "Yes, yes, I believe it is all for the best." Her mind was recurring to Lacy. Mr. Morton understood her thoughts, and forebore all further remark.

In spite of his self-congratulation at escaping from the trammels of a false assumption of wealth, Mr. Morton soon gave way to melancholy, on viewing the features of his new situation. It was plain that his former character and station in the world could be maintained no longer, and that he must henceforward be content to give up, not only the parade in which he had so long delighted, but

the more praise-worthy enjoyment of the pleasures of an extensive society. Unfortunately, too, he had been but little accustomed to seek for social happiness in his own domestic circle. He could hardly be blamed for this, for the search promised little success. Lady Louisa was a dull companion; Lady Malvern had scarcely interested him more; and of Agnes, till within the last three years, he had never seen much. She was now his chief, and he might almost say, his only consolation; for his youngest daughter was still but a child, and his sons were absent.

On Agnes now devolved the difficult though grateful task of administering that consolation, of which her parents seemed so much in need. She had been a bright ornament in their days of prosperity; but it was now that her value was most deeply felt. The gloom of their situation would have seemed intolerable, but for the cheering influence of that mental sunshine, which, harassed as she was by other sorrows, superadded to theirs, she could always diffuse around her. She was not only a zealous, but a judicious comforter—she did not press unavailing topics of consolation—she did not provoke to an indulgence in repining by seeming to underrate the extent of the misfortune—she acknowledged its magnitude, and at the same time showed that she could contemplate it without dejection—she never appeared solicitous to console, an appearance which must ever defeat the object; but contrived that consolation should seem to come unbidden, rather than to have been summoned by her ingenuity.

The first friend and adviser whom Mr. Morton called to his aid, was Sackville, to whom he wrote after his resignation of the contest, and begged for his immediate presence. Sackville was then at his

country seat, at the distance of about fifty miles from Dodswell, and on the second day after the receipt of the letter, having forwarded an excuse for his delay, he joined the disconsolate party. In the meantime, we may pause to review the machinations of this dangerous and deceitful person.

CHAPTER XI.

We must not make a scarecrow of the law,
Setting it up to scare the birds of prey,
And let it keep one shape, till custom make it
Their perch, and not their terror.
Measure for Measure.

Mr. Morton's letter to Sackville caused neither surprise nor sorrow to the latter. The event of the execution was not unexpected nor unwelcome. On the contrary, it had been promoted by himself, under the agency of Allen, acting on the fears and impatience of Mr. Morton's other creditors; and the time at which it had been carried into effect had been expressly marked by his direction. He had secured to himself the hand of Agnes, by terrifying her weak father with the prospect of a discovery of his embarrassment; and, having gained this object, he no longer feared to realize the threatened evil. His motives for procuring the execution to be levied against Mr. Morton were chiefly economical; and their object was to check that course of expense, which was every day adding to the frightful magnitude of his embarrassments.

The fortune of Agnes he regarded as eventually his own; and, though he intended after their union to resist her wish of liberally administering to the necessities of her parents, he considered it desirable that those necessities should be previously contracted as much as possible, and that the accumu-

lation of debt should be checked. He also thought it better that the situation of Mr. Morton should be known to the world before his marriage with Agnes. There would be something apparently disinterested in marrying the daughter of a ruined man, even though that daughter were an independent heiress; and it would give to his mercenary match the amiable colouring of the purest affection. Besides, if assistance must be afforded, it would be both cheaper and more meritorious to relieve the humble wants of acknowledged poverty, than to minister to the private cravings of habitual extravagance.

It was therefore decided that the life of profusion which Mr. Morton had so long led, must have its immediate end, and that he should at length be taught retrenchment in the bitter school of undisguised adversity. This was one of his objects; the other was of a much darker character. It was not sufficient that the blow should be struck, unless it could be made instrumental to setting at variance the Mortons and Lacys, and blackening the character of the latter. His measures, with respect to Herbert Lacy, were no longer dictated by mere precaution. Jealousy and hate now urged him to pursue, unnecessarily, for their gratification, those plots which were first prescribed by the calculations of self-interest. He hated the man whom he had injured; hated him *because* he had injured him. He knew that Agnes had loved, and still, at least, respected and esteemed him; and this he could not brook. Had she been his at that moment he would not have deemed his triumph sufficient, unless he could have caused her to look with abhorrence on the object of her first attachment.

We will now conduct our readers to Mr. Sackville's seat at Trentford. The time will be a few

hours after the arrival of Mr. Morton's letter. The place, a room somewhat too spacious and elegant for the antiquated name of study, yet to which those of library or drawing-room would be equally inapplicable. It presented to the eye various insignia, alike of business and of literary leisure; and the spectator, like Hercules, pressed to make his choice, stood perplexed among the various inducements to exertion and to indolence. A solemn, business-like inkstand, of large dimensions, was opposed to the last luxurious contrivance for easy reading, a chair, ostensibly for study, but more truly calculated for sleep; tape-tied papers were relieved by a review; and a large blue report of the bullion committee, was surmounted (*proh pudor!*) by the last new novel. Newspapers, and a few of the minor fry of periodical works, filled up the intervals, together with numerous pamphlets "from the author," on the corn, catholic, and other questions.

Sackville was alone in this apartment. A book was in his hand, but his mind seemed to be otherwise engaged. His look was that of disappointment and impatience; and he muttered, from time to time, half audible expressions, as if taxing some person with delay. At length his anxiety was appeased by the entrance of a servant, who said that Mr. Allen desired to see him, and presently that person was introduced.

"It matters not," said sackville, when after the first greetings, Allen began to apologize for his delay; "it matters not; and now to business. First read this letter," and he put into his hands that which he had received from Mr. Morton. "So far, good. Your friend, the suing creditor, may congratulate himself on having given the victory to his own party; and you, Allen, may congratulate yourself on having done a substantial kindness to Mr. Morton."

Allen smiled, as if at the irony of the observation.

"I speak seriously," replied Sackville; "I do consider it a kindness, and it was meant as such by me. It will open his eyes to his real situation. It would have been better for him if it had happened long ago, but I hope it will not come too late to save him."

"I am sure, Sir, I hope so as much as you can do," said Allen, with a demure, half suppressed smile, as if he fully penetrated the hypocrisy of Sackville's expressions. Sackville gave him a short, inquiring look, and then proceeded.

"I said the execution was well timed. I do not know whether you understand me; if not, I must explain. You are aware that it has forced him to resign the contest, and has given the victory to the other party. Nothing could happen better for them; if they had devised the business themselves they could not have devised it more successfully."

Allen assented.

"Well," pursued Sackville, "now, I ask, may not Mr. Morton reasonably suppose that they actually did contrive it? Your friend, the suing creditor, is a voter on the Lacy side; he may have acted, not only for his own individual benefit, but for the advantage of his party; and Mr. Lacy might have known what was to happen, and have even advised and encouraged the measure."

"He might, certainly," replied Allen, doggedly; "but I know, for my own part, that he had nothing to do with it."

"I know that too; but others need not know the same. In short, to come to the point at once, I wish that Mr. Morton should think that he was the instigator of all that has happened. I have paved the way to this belief in a manner which I will afterwards explain. The means of instilling it fur-

ther I shall then leave to you. I know, my friend, that you have a plausible tongue, and a good resolute face, and a very fertile invention. I shall not ask you to do any thing disgraceful,—to tell coarse plump, flaring lies,—simply to insinuate. I want a proof of your address; but, 'a word to the wise'—you understand me—let it be as I desire, and you shall find me not ungrateful."

Allen looked grave and thoughtful.

"I understand you, Sir," said he: "and I believe you know that I would do a great deal to serve you; but I must honestly tell you that I do not like this business. I should be very sorry to engage in it, and I must beg you will excuse me."

"Impossible," said Sackville, drily.

"I have no heart of it," continued Allen. "I think it is much such another business as the last, and you know how that turned out."

"That was an unfortunate affair, I acknowledge. The duel was quite unexpected, and might have had very serious consequences; though, as it happened, no evil resulted from it, and the parties became better friends than before. But here I promise you that there shall be no fighting: not even a lawsuit, Allen, which is more in your style of hostility. The parties shall not exchange one angry word, and every thing shall be conducted with a due regard to your most peaceable intentions."

"That may be, Sir—that may be; but I don't see the object, and I don't like the principle. Here is a young gentleman to be taxed unjustly, and made to appear in a shameful light; and there is Mr. Morton made to bear all sorts of ill will towards a person that does not deserve it. I cannot think that this is right, Sir, and I don't like to have a hand in it."

"Indeed!" said Sackville, with a scornful smile. "You are grown mightily conscientious! Allen, I

must tell you plainly that I think you might have had somewhat more confidence in me. You need not have supposed so readily that my motives must be wrong, merely because you could not understand them. You say you can not see the object —nor do I intend you to see it. You force me to speak plainly—you are my instrument, Sir, and not my fellow counsellor. You do not see the great and useful end I have in view, and you are starting at what you consider the equivocal nature of the means. Perhaps you don't know that in questions of morality, the means are totally disregarded; the end is the only thing considered. Nobody can be said to have acted either ill or well till the whole of his conduct can be viewed together. If you want an apology for evil means, only look at the scheme of Providence. Nature works by them as well as by that which is good—and surely always for a happy end. Why are lightnings and earthquakes permitted? Why do vipers encumber the earth? Why are murderers and robbers, aye, and forgers left unpunished? I tell you they have all their use. Let me have no more scruples. It may be some poor satisfaction to you to express them; but they can have no effect upon me, because I know that they are needless. I say these things, not to exculpate myself, but to satisfy you. It was unnecessary for me to have explained my sentiments so fully; but I wished to act a friendly part, and I expect that you will show your sense of it."

"Mr. Sackville," replied Allen in a submissive tone, "I beg your pardon, if I seemed to accuse you of meaning to do what was wrong. I am sure I have as much confidence in you as I should have in any gentleman that was to make the same proposal to me. I am a plain, simple man, Sir, and what little learning I have, has been picked up

here and there, as I best could. I am sure I won't pretend to argue with you about the morality of the case: I leave all that to you, Sir. I dare say it is quite correct, since you say it is. But I hope you will consider, that whether it may be right or not in the end, it will be a very dangerous business for me."

"Dangerous!" exclaimed Sackville, with a laugh. "Oh, then, it is fear, and not morality, that makes you so scrupulous on this occasion."

"You may laugh, Sir, and call it fear," said Allen; "but I cannot see that there is any shame in being mindful of consequences."

"No: nor do I wish you to be unmindful of them; but be pleased to recollect the consequences of disobeying me."

A silence ensued. Sackville turned away, leaving his hint to operate; and Allen, with a dark and troubled countenance, was reflecting on the most advisable answer to such a denunciation.

"I do not wish to disobey you, Sir," said he, "and I will give you a proof of it. Here, Sir, at this moment, I am ready to promise to do what you ask, upon condition that you will first grant me one little favour."

"I cannot listen to conditions; I asked for compliance, without reserve."

"Nay, but the favour is so trifling."

"Well, then, name it."

"Then, Sir, I ask you to let me first see—*that paper*."

Sackville regarded him with surprise and suspicion.

"You have made a strange request," said he; "what profit or pleasure can you find in looking at your own forgery?"

Allen returned no answer.

"This is mere trifling, Allen. If you have a

sufficient reason, tell it; but don't suppose that I can go out of my way to gratify an idle whim."

"I am sorry to hear it, Sir, because, in this case, neither can I go out of my way to do as you desired me."

"Good God! but consider the consequences."

"Yes, Sir, I do consider the consequences, and I shall leave them to follow as they may. I am very sorry to seem to thwart you, but I really cannot comply unless you grant me this favour."

"I understand it," thought Sackville. "The rascal has taken it into his head that I have not the power I assume; that the paper is defective, or not in my possession. Perhaps it is better to undeceive him. A refusal would only confirm his suspicions—Allen," said he, sternly, "I cannot commend the reasonableness of your request; but nevertheless, it shall be granted:" and so saying, he quitted the room, leaving Allen alone to all the gloomy retrospect of guilt, and the fearful hopes which he had then before him. His motives were partly such as Sackville had conjectured; but in addition to these, he had also proposed to himself the bold measure of forcibly seizing and destroying the forged paper. In a set struggle with Sackville, who was a strong and well-made man, he could have little chance of succeeding; and he could therefore depend only upon craft, and the unexpectedness and rapidity of his movements. While he was arranging his plan of attack, and nerving his courage for the encounter, Sackville re-entered the room.

The first thing he did was to lock the door.—Allen's anxious eyes were instantly turned towards him in expectation of the paper; but he saw no such object in Sackville's hand; he saw only the startling spectacle of a pistol, a powder-horn, and a bullet. Sackville neither spoke nor looked at him, but walked to the other end of the room, and

deliberately began to [illegible] his pocket. Allen's heart sunk within him.

"Mr. Sackville! the paper!" said he, imploringly.

Sackville neither looked up, nor answered him a word.

"Mr. Sackville—I ask—I beg—I hope you will oblige me."

Still no answer.

"Mr. Sackville, for God's sake—pray explain!" said Allen, advancing.

"Stand back," interrupted Sackville, sternly.

"I am not alarmed, Sir," continued Allen. "I am still prepared to ask the same. It will do you little credit, Sir, to attack a defenceless man. Pray consider——"

"Peace! peace!" cried Sackville, with a look of scorn. "Do you think, if I wished to shorten your miserable life, it would not be the same way to let the gallows do its office? I shall not take the trouble to hurt you!" and then having [illegible] his pistol, he rose and went to a large [illegible] which occupied a recess in the room. There he opened and drew forth the ominous paper which contained Allen's forgery. He then turned towards the person, and approached him, holding it in his hand the paper, and in the other, the [illegible] pistol.

"Allen," said he, with a [illegible] must excuse my precautions. Instruments like that which hold the power of life and death are not to be shown lightly, especially to those who are interested in destroying them. I will not suppose that you thought so meanly of my discretion as to imagine that I [illegible] would a newspaper. No—[illegible] so saying, he presented the pistol [illegible] Allen's breast, and [illegible] shrunk backward, [illegible]

self," continued Sackville, coolly, "and listen to what I am going to say. You are aware that with one slight motion of this forefinger, I could put an end to your existence; yes—I see you are aware of it—good—and now I am going to gratify you. Here is the paper you wished to see. You shall not only see it, Sir, but you shall hold it in your own hands. You may read, scrutinize, spell every syllable, count the letters if you choose; but if you make the slightest attempt to destroy it—move but one finger with such an intention, and that minute will be your last. There, receive your forgery."

So saying, he placed in Allen's hand the paper on which hung his life. A death-like silence ensued. Allen stood motionless, holding before his eyes the fatal document, with the muzzle of Sackville's pistol about a yard from his breast. The situation of Allen was inconceivably tremendous, and thoughts of the most terrible nature were conflicting in his mind, while his eyes were wandering over the writing, of which he distinguished not a line. Even at that moment, and in spite of Sackville's awful threat, he was meditating the destruction of the paper; and once he looked up to try if he could discern any symptoms of mercy or irresolution in the aspect of his opponent; but he was met by a glance of deadly determination from Sackville's eye, which indicated at once that he had not threatened one tittle that he would not execute.

Allen's countenance fell; his resolution seemed to be blasted by that glance, and he felt his flesh creep with terror. All the awfulness of his situation burst at once upon him. He held in his hand one instrument for his own destruction, and another was before him. The deadly paper, and the deadly pistol—death by the law, and by the hand

of Sackville—were present to his mind at once, and he seemed like a wretched captive, so environed by forms of death, that he could in no way fly from its influence. This impression, and the terrible risk he was meditating, were too powerful for his resolution. Cold drops started from the forehead of the miserable delinquent; his lips quivered; his eyes looked glazed and wandering; his whole frame seemed to totter; and, with a trembling hand, he restored the paper to Sackville. The latter received it in silence, and surveying, with a look of contemptuous compassion, the pale and trembling figure of the unfortunate Allen, he poured out a glass of water and offered it to him to drink.

"Take this," said he; "you have need of it: you have exposed yourself to an unnecessary trial; but you little thought it would be so severe. You will be wiser for the future. And now," pursued Sackville, after a short pause, "I conclude that you will not refuse to do what I require."

"I submit," replied the other.

"Then you have nothing to fear; and if you second my views effectually, you shall have much to expect."

Here ended the conversation, and the worthy confederates separated.

CHAPTER XII.

Let us prove that our minds are no slaves to fortune; and in adversity triumph over adversity.

SIR PHILIP SIDNEY.

THE sudden discovery and great extent of Mr. Morton's embarrassment, caused considerable surprise among his neighbours. In this land of commerce, public opinion is rather disposed to magnify the profits of successful speculation; and, accordingly, the father of Mr. Morton was generally believed to have left him a much greater fortune than was really the case. Mr. Morton was conscious, from the first moment of possessing it, that he was considered a richer man than he was, and this delusion of the public he had ever since been most fatally eager to strengthen. Regarding it, justly, as one of his most potent claims to respect, he had spared no pains to preserve, unimpeached, his character for opulence; and it is, therefore, not surprising that the world, which had hailed his opening career with a delusion, should have been still further blinded by his efforts to confirm it.—That he had debts was known to many; but this was supposed to proceed less from want, than from that carelessness which he always affected with respect to money, and few doubted his ability to pay them.

But, great as might be the surprise which his neighbours really felt at his unexpected ruin, they

soon ceased to express any. Most of them were soon prepared with their budget of previous suspicions, and sure indications, and startling circumstances, which they would have mentioned long ago, if charity had not forbidden. Society abounds with these "prophets of the past," who try to indemnify themselves for real short-sightedness, by pretending that the discovery of their foresight was controlled only by their discretion or benevolence.

Lord Rodborough, contrary to his usual custom, laid no claim to such foreknowledge. He thought it was better to be perfectly innocent of all previous acquaintance with the state of Mr. Morton's affairs; and that it would accord most becomingly with his dignified carelessness, not to have stooped to the consideration of so trivial a subject. He also chose to consider himself ill-used, by having been kept in the dark about it, which could not have been the case if he had entertained any previous suspicions. This appears to have been his first feeling, upon receiving the intelligence which Mr. Morton had despatched to him, after retiring from the company of his supporters at Wichcombe.

"If the fellow was distressed," said his lordship, adjusting his cravat as he spoke,—"Why the devil did not he tell me so? I like openness especially in these money matters; it saves a d—d deal of inconvenience;" and under this dignified view of the subject, he despatched the answer which gave such violent, and, we may add, such just offence to Mr. Morton.

That unfortunate person was utterly depressed by this calamity. He felt degraded in the eye of the world, shrunk with horror from the idea of society, and could scarcely bear to meet the face of a familiar friend. He [illegible]ed himself, de-

spondingly, and with some truth, in the light of a detected impostor. He knew that he had long deceived the world with a false show of affluence, and he feared that it would be found not backward in taking vengeance for the fraud. It is true that he was released from the burthen of supporting false appearances, and he tried, in his misery, to account it a relief. But those appearances, irksome as they might prove, had been among the main objects of his life. A bitter sense of the degradation which must ensue to himself and his family formed the most poignant part of his afflictions. As for the deprivation of former luxuries, he viewed it, at first, with comparative disregard; such sacrifices seem ever trifling in the aggregate, and it is only when viewed and attempted separately, that their greatness becomes known. Besides, to one who was writhing, like Mr. Morton, under the infliction of imaginary contempt, it was even a consolation to be able, by personal privations, to lay some claim to the dignity of suffering.

He had indeed, much to bear, and it was useless to disguise how much. His establishment must be broken up, his goods sold, and he must fly from Dodswell. He felt little difficulty in breaking these circumstances to Agnes, for he saw in her a strength of mind which would enable her to receive them calmly. She even anticipated the terrible necessity, and anticipated it almost with cheerfulness. But it was difficult to disclose the real extent of their misfortune to Lady Louisa, in such a way as to mitigate its severity. When she heard that all they had must be sold, even her very jewels, she persisted for some time, in discrediting the possibility of such an outrage.

But the methodical diligence of the sheriff's officers soon convinced her of the unhappy truth.

They had immediately proceeded to take an inventory of all the moveable property that the house contained; and Lady Louisa found herself obliged to resign her jewels, and see them included in the list. Many and earnest were her entreaties for the exemption of her paraphernalia; and she vainly thought to shock and intimidate the myrmidons of the law, by informing them that they were laying their unhallowed hands on jewels that had been worn by a Duchess of Swansea. But she found that the dignity of the former possessor, was totally inapplicable to the present case and was thrown into the last agony of despair, by being told civilly, but with an air of decision that admitted of no resistance, that any such exemption was impossible.

The under-sheriff appeared at Dodswell, and seemed desirous of softening, as far as was possible, the rigours of the law. Such simple moveables as were absolutely necessary, were allowed to be retained, and their fears were quieted, of being obliged to seek a new abode in a state of utter destitution. They had no complaints to make of harshness and brutality, on the part of those whose duty it was to execute the legal mandate. They received, from these authorized intruders, all the deference and civility which circumstances admitted, and it was evident that a wish was entertained to spare their feelings as much as possible.

But there are states of the mind in which this exemption from the very worst that can befall, is hardly received as a relief. Suffering seems robbed of that dignity, the sense of which supports us under it, when we find that far from our having endured, its extremities, it has, notwithstanding its severity, still been alleviated. This unavailing mercy, which strives to lighten the evil without being able to remove it, seems but a contemptuous

tribute to our weakness. It unnerves our fortitude; and while it takes a little from the heap of our misfortunes, makes us more keenly sensible of all that remains.

These may not be the feelings most proper for the unfortunate, but they are very natural ones, especially in minds which have ever listened to the dictates of pride. They occurred in galling bitterness to Mr. Morton, and he never more strongly felt his degradation than when he found himself an object of compassion to a sheriff's officer.

On the second day after the despatch of the letter to Sackville, that gentleman arrived at Dodswell. His presence was received by all as a welcome succour. Even Agnes was glad of his arrival; for though she had misgivings of the real goodness of his disposition, she could fully appreciate his companionable qualities, and had great reliance in his clear worldly sense and address in matters of business, and doubted not that he would recommend such courses as were most advisable in their present situation. She had also another still more urgent reason for wishing to see him. He was one of the trustees in whose hands her own large fortune was placed, and she wished for his advice and permission in rendering that fortune available for the relief of her parents.

Hers was a cruel situation. Mistress of wealth, she was not only threatened with the evils of poverty, but compelled to see her parents exposed to it without being able to offer more than vague hopes of future assistance. Her mother evidently relied upon her for help, and somewhat too regardless of the sacrifice she was exacting, had almost expressed her opinion that the fortune of Agnes would save them from the necessity of quitting Dodswell. To these broad hints and distressing appeals, Agnes scarcely knew how to reply; and she feared lest

her mother, who was inaccessible to all explanation upon subjects of business, would attribute her reserve to the want rather of will than of power.

Agnes took an early opportunity of consulting with Sackville upon these important points, and earnestly entreated him to give his consent to the application of a large part of her fortune to the liquidation of her father's debts. Sackville seemed moved and interested by her appeal, assured her of his most entire sympathy, and promised to co-operate with her to the utmost of his power. He then began to point out the difficulties that lay in the way of his compliance. He reminded her that his single voice was insufficient for the adoption of any measure without the consent of Mr. Hawskworth, the other trustee; and he assured her, that to the best of his belief that consent would not be obtained but with the utmost difficulty. He described to her the inflexible pertinacity of his colleague, the jealous vigilance with which he watched over the accumulation of her fortune, and the probable earnestness with which he would resist any attempt to diminish it.

"But improbable as it may be," said Sackville, "we will suppose that his consent is gained: what will be the result? Very different from what you anticipate. You feel an amiable and generous wish to relieve your parents, and to restore them to their former situation, and you think that this may be done; but it is my duty to undeceive you, and to tell you that it is not possible. You may discharge some of the debts, it is true, out of your income: but you cannot enable your father to live here, as he has done. It is absolutely necessary that there should be a great and immediate retrenchment, and I need hardly tell you that this would be carried into effect much more completely by quitting Dodswell, than by remaining here.

I think too, you will acknowledge, that such a course would be less painful to your father's feelings. To live here still with straightened means while every thing around reminded him of former splendours, and of luxuries, and even comforts, which he must now deny himself, would be infinitely more galling than a much greater change of life elsewhere. It would be a subject of perpetual vexation; and I am confident, that it is wiser to suffer the shock of parting, than to endure, day by day, the lingering mortification which he would otherwise be exposed to."

Agnes concurred with him in the propriety of quitting Dodswell, but still urged her entreaty to be allowed to contribute to the liquidation of the debts. She alluded to their own engagement, and to the prospect of her fortune becoming eventually his; and appealed pointedly to his generosity, and remarked somewhat warmly on the imputation to which he might be exposed of thwarting her liberal views, because they might interfere with his future interests. She was animated by the strong desire of assisting her parents, and spoke with an energy and decision, for which Sackville was unprepared, and which at first startled and perplexed him. Nevertheless, he heard her with calmness and patience, and answered without hesitation.

"You have allowed yourself," said he, "to express a little doubt of the disinterestedness of my motives, but I know that it is an impression which you will not long maintain. It cannot affect me, and I will let it pass. You wish me to urge Mr. Hawskworth to join with me in satisfying the demands of your father's creditors out of your fortune. Do you know whom I should have to pay? Myself. Yes, I see you are surprised: but it is very true. I am one of your father's

principal creditors. I am not one of those who now sue him, nor will I partake of the spoil. I once hoped to have prevented what has now happened; I became his creditor to save him from the rapacity of others—bought up several of his debts, and in so doing, became indebted myself. But for me what has now burst upon your father would have happened long ago. I will not say, that in the end it might not have been better for him, if his distresses had been made apparent sooner, but still I have a satisfaction in thinking that I postponed the evil day, and ensured to you all a few more years of happiness. This is what I have done, and yet I live to hear my disinterestedness questioned, and by you, because I will not urge a measure, by which I myself should be an immediate gainer. Oh, Agnes, this is indeed a cruel return; but you were not conscious of the whole truth, and if you had been so, I could excuse much at such a time."

Agnes expressed her sorrow for the injustice she had done him. Sackville declared himself satisfied, and proceeded.

"There is another view of the subject, in which I have not yet presented it to you. Suppose your whole fortune at your absolute disposal, and let us consider what, under present circumstances, would be the most judicious mode of proceeding. You should think not only of the present distresses of your parents, but of the future prospects of your brothers and sister. It is true, they have each a small independent fortune, but if this is all they are to look to, they will be ill provided for in after life. You should therefore so act as to benefit all, and this I assure you can never be done by opening the flood-gates of a lavish generosity. Economy and retrenchment are absolutely essential for the welfare of all, and you would be doing only an

unkindness, by rendering it less strongly felt. Your father—I may safely say it, for you know my respect for his many good qualities—your father is very deficient in prudence. His present situation shows it; and I fear there would be little prospect of amendment, as long as he had the means of supporting his former extravagance. Your means are ample, but you must not think them inexhaustible. They would soon fail, and then what would be the fate of all! Be reconciled to what has occurred. This blow may prove a salutary warning. Good often springs out of evil."

A slight gleam of satisfaction passed across the countenance of Agnes: she could not reply to the arguments of Sackville, but her desire of relieving her parents out of her own superfluity still could not be repressed. He watched her looks, and traced the workings of her mind.

"I see," he added, "that you are not yet satisfied. Well, then, I must have recourse to an argument, which I little thought to have required: you may wonder why I did not make use of it at first, but I wished to convince your reason, and I did not like to hurt you unnecessarily, by alluding to the excellent friend that we have lost—I mean your aunt. You may think her decision somewhat harsh, and that, were she now living, she might be induced to act differently; but this is beyond our knowledge. I can only tell you how she did decide, and I know you will feel that with respect to the fortune which she left you, her will should be law."

Agnes expressed an earnest assent: Sackville paused for a moment, and then went on.

"Our excellent relation was strongly impressed with the idea of your father's extravagance. She seems to have foreseen that he would become embarrassed; and it was her wish that this misfortune

might be caused to fall as lightly as possible on his children. A short time before her death, she spoke to me upon this subject. Her will was then made. I was acquainted with its contents. She spoke, and with deep satisfaction, of the fortune which she had been enabled to leave to you. She then expressed fears of her brother's improvidence, and begged that I would not permit any money to be raised upon the security of your fortune, to be applied to the payment of his debts. I of course promised compliance, for I had no right to oppose her will: but—I don't know how it happened—I think of it now as a fortunate accident; I seem to have anticipated the entreaty that I am now exposed to—I told her, that such a refusal on my part, might hereafter seem harsh and invidious, and I begged that I might be provided with authority for my refusal by the expression of her wish in writing. She gave it me. I have it still; and since it must be so, I will now show it."

He left the room, and soon returned with the paper, which he put into the hand of Agnes. She recognised her aunt's hand-writing, and silently regarded it with emotion and respect. She turned away her face to conceal her tears—then restored the paper to Sackville, and said in a low and broken voice, "I am satisfied," and the painful subject was then dismissed.

CHAPTER XIII.

Every wish which leads us to expect happiness somewhere else than where we are, only lays a foundation for uneasiness.
GOLDSMITH.

It was decided that the family should quit Dodswell as soon as possible, and the only question that remained was, where they should go. Retirement was considered a primary object, and various secluded parts of England and the Continent were proposed and rejected in turn. Sackville, who wished to retain them as much as possible within his grasp, and under his eye, until his marriage with Agnes, offered them his own house at Trentford: but, Mr. Morton, whose pride shrunk from the acceptance of such an extent of obligation, refused this offer, as well as a similar one, that had been made by Lord and Lady Malvern. Sackville then recommended London or its vicinity, and brought forward many plausible arguments in its favour. The health of Lady Louisa, he was very sure, required that she should be in the neighbourhood of good medical advice, an opinion in which she strongly concurred: London, he said, and with some truth, was the best place for solitude, and retirement—nowhere could seclusion be practised more effectually—let them only live out of the way, and show themselves never, or but seldom, in the world, and they might enjoy as complete a seclusion as if two hundred miles divi-

ded them from the capital. Then he described so well the meddling, prying curiosity of remote neighbourhoods, and the difficulty of escaping from vulgar intrusion where every one, however insignificant, became an object of attention, that Mr. Morton was soon brought to think that no where could he be so effectually concealed from notice as in the metropolis itself.

Thither it was finally determined that the whole family should soon proceed, and Sackville offered to go before them, with the view of obtaining some quiet and humble residence. The yearly allowance of Agnes, and a small income constituting Lady Louisa's pin-money, were the only funds upon which they could now depend: their large household were all, with the exception of three old servants, obliged to be dismissed; many of them quitted the house long before the departure of the family, and its gloomy air of desertion, which every day became more apparent, added greatly to the misery of its unhappy inmates.

From the moment that the sheriff's officers had entered the house, the hand of care and attention seemed to have been suspended; and the whole *menage* began to assume a character of confusion and discomfort. The outward signs of those little indefinable elegancies which characterize a well-ordered English country residence, had rapidly begun to vanish; and before the Mortons had quitted it, Dodswell almost wore the appearance of being deserted. Within the dwelling there was little to relieve its silent gloom, except the melancholy preparations for the departure of the family, and for the approaching sale of the effects; pictures were removed from their places to be marked and registered, and rooms that had often been the scenes of social gaiety, were now converted into comfortless repositories of the collected spoil.

Their are few who can withstand the influence of local attachments. Our country, our dwelling, and, above all, the place of our birth, are frequently clung to with an ardour which, though we cannot coolly justify its reasonableness, we find it no less difficult to subdue. We almost act as if we fancied that the inanimate objects from which we part so mournfully, were for a while endued with conciousness, and could participate in our regrets. They recal to our minds past scenes, and former friends; and we view them as relics that are hallowed to our feelings by the associations which they convey. Many an object intrinsically trifling acquires a value beyond estimation, by circumstances of this nature. Wide, indeed, is the range of cherished recollections that cling around an ancient dwelling, and cruel is the blow that violates such a sanctuary.

At length the day arrived when the Mortons were to quit Dodswell. Distress had never seemed to press so heavy upon them as at that moment: to leave a home even under prosperous circumstances, and with a prospect of return, is melancholy; and they had neither present happiness nor cheering prospects. It was early on a gloomy morning in February, that the family set out upon their journey. The weather was stormy, and the sighing of the wind, and beating of the rain against their desolate mansion, added not a little to the depressing sights and sounds that encompassed them; and large patches of unmelted snow, served only to increase, by their contrast, the wintery blackness of the remainder of the landscape.

Two old servants accompanied the family, who, together with one that had been sent forward to prepare that humble dwelling that awaited them in London, now formed the whole of their reduced establishment; and with heavy hearts the party

drove from their own doors. Lady Lousia, and Agnes, and her younger sister, could not refrain from tears of bitter regret. Mr. Morton's strength had seemed almost to fail him as he entered the carriage, and he remained long sunk in silent dejection. They received a few marks of respectful condolence from their humble neighbours; but these demonstrations were rare. The Mortons, unhappily, had not conciliated the good-will of their inferiors, so successfully as that of their superiors and equals. Mr. Morton's manners were naturally haughty; and the people could ill-brook an air of aristocratic pride in one whose ancestors, within the memory of men still living, had mingled in the rank of the lowest classes. His extravagance, and frequent want of money, had also rendered him far other than a liberal landlord. Lady Louisa wished well to all, and did no harm to any; but she had never given herself the trouble of doing good.

The spirits of the party gradually improved as they receded from their own neighbourhood, and from scenes which they had so often viewed under happier circumstances. Desirous of change, they looked forward with a sort of melancholy satisfaction, even to their arrival in London, and were glad to trace the first visible effects of its far extended influence.

Of all cities in the world, London, perhaps, extends most widely its influence on the character of the surrounding country, and announces itself to the traveller at the greatest distance. Neither Paris, Naples, nor Vienna, the three cities of Christendom which approach it most nearly in size, can offer any comparison in this respect. They seem to have contributed little to the territory around them, and to have received little in return: the limits between town and country are clearly

defined, and the intercourse between them is comparatively slight: few indications of increasing activity, population, and wealth, meet the observation of the approaching stranger; and if his eye does not rest upon the roofs and pinnacles of the city, he will be scarcely concious of its vicinity, till he is stopped by the soldier who demands his passport.

But who that approaches London can fail to note the far extended indications of its mighty presence? Even in this favoured land in which the general diffusion of civilization and wealth are the happiest and most distinguishing characteristics, even here the change is very evident as we approach the capital. The roads are better, and more thronged; the fields more carefully tilled; villas rise around in quicker succession, and the towns have an increasing air of gaiety, activity, and wealth; greater continually becomes the number, and more eager the haste of those who hurry to and fro, as if not the mere business of everyday life, but some great event of general interest was setting all society in motion; houses thicken on either side, at first separate, and far dispersed, then clustering into connected rows—now admitting glimpses of the fields behind them, then at length backed by other buildings, and enclosing you in every direction; till by degrees, country is found to be lost in town; you are at length beneath the influence of that smoky veil which many hours ago was seen hanging over the distant horizon; and the increasing turmoil, and bewildering movement of a teeming population, soon impel you to the full conviction that you are penetrating the recesses of the modern Babylon.

Few can enter this colossal city without feeling for awhile an oppressive sense of their own comparative insignificance. The most distinguished personages seem shorn of some portion of their

consequence, and every one perceives that even to their immediate friends they become the objects of a less powerful and engrossing interest as soon as they mingle in the maze of London.

This feeling, which is often unpleasantly humiliating, was now soothing and consolatory to the wounded spirits of Mr. Morton. He found in his desolate abandonment by a strange and careless crowd, the truth of that seclusion which Sackville had promised; and though it was more oppressive than the rural retirement of a remote district, he was comforted in judging it to be more effectual.

The house which Sackville had selected for him was situated in a quarter which, in the flippancy of his more prosperous days, he would have called the Polar regions. It was one of the Alpha Cottages, separated widely from the *soi-disant* habitable part of the west-end by that *impassable* barrier, the New-road. It was a small, melancholy, square building, imbedded in a damp, weedy garden. It retired many yards from the public way, an anomalous mixture of street and road, to which one knows not which name to assign, and commanded no more cheering view than wooden palisades, deformed with bills and chalkings; a gloomy row of high poplars, and, behind these, the comfortless shell of an unfinished range of buildings.

The party entered their humble dwelling with strong feelings of mortification and disgust; and the sight of the comparative wretchedness to which they had so suddenly sunk, caused many tears to Lady Lousia. Agnes tried to make the best of the dreariness of their situation; for she felt that now the time was come when they must feel the stern reality of that poverty which they had hitherto only been anticipating. She endeavoured to impress upon them how little is necessary to comfort when ostentatious feelings are once dismissed.—

The airiness and quietness of the dwelling were placed in the most favourable points of view, and even the contracted size of the rooms was made to appear in the light of an advantage; and reasons for being well pleased with the humility of this place of refuge were sedulously and successfully sought.

With the calm energy of unpretending benevolence, she extracted, for the comfort of her dispirited parents, many an unexpected good out of the bitter cup of their afflictions. She presented to them a cheering view whenever circumstances admitted it; and when the flattering prospect was denied, she could lighten the pressure of misfortune by the meek and Christian principle of uncomplaining resignation.

CHAPTER XIV.

I will stand no more
On other's legs, nor build one joy without me.
If I be ever worth a house again
I'll build all inward: not a light shall ope
The common outway: no expense, no art,
No ornament, no door will I use there,
But raise all plain and rudely, like a rampire,
Against the false society of men.

CHAPMAN.

WEEK after week rolled on in dull succession, and the Mortons remained in the same state of humble and melancholy seclusion. Their society was almost limited to Sackville and Lord and Lady Malvern. Few of their acquaintance were then in town, and of these, still fewer had discovered the place of their retreat, or took the trouble of coming to see them. Such as did call were seldom received, for Mr. Morton had become timidly sensitive since his distress had been made public, and shrunk from a meeting with all who were not old friends, or bound to him by the ties of relationship. He exhibited, in this instance, a singular waywardness and contrariety of feeling. Shunning society, and professing, with truth, to be averse to a meeting with any but his most intimate acquaintance, he was still keenly alive to neglect, and seemed constantly haunted with a dread of being forgotten.

He had always been sensitive on this point, but he was much more so now. He was severely gall-

ed by a want of attention even in those persons whom he had no desire to see. The sight of a visiter's card could restore him to comparative good spirits: and when day after day had passed, and no friend had come to his door, his spirits visibly sunk, and he would occasionally speak with much bitterness of the ingratitude of the world, and the heartless indifference of society.

Persons in such a situation are somewhat prone to magnify the injustice of the neglect they suffer. They forget the principles upon which they acted in their days of prosperity, and expect returns which they had previously never anticipated.—They paid in tinsel, and seek their late reward in pure and solid ore. They think not that they have been repaid already in the same light coin which they dispensed. Is there a friend for whom they have incurred a sacrifice, on whom they have conferred a lasting benefit? From such let them require the same. But the light interchange of society has given them no such enviable claim.—They sought a temporary pleasure, and they gained it; and yet how bitterly can they exclaim against those associates who withhold their notice in the hour of reverse. They talk of ruin magnanimously incurred for the entertainment of those who now desert them. Ruin was in truth incurred; but it was for the gratification of a restless vanity: and, after all, the world, which they call ungrateful, is little more than sternly just.

Among the relations who called upon the Mortons, and whose visits they received with pleasure, was the young Duke of Swansea. The late duke, Lady Louisa's brother, had never been on terms of cordiality with his sister and her husband; but the present possessor of the title, much to his credit, had not chosen to inherit the uncharitableness of his father. He was a frank, open-hearted young

man, unaffected and unspoiled, and hitherto happily insensible to the attempts that had been made to impress him with a high opinion of himself. His abilities, perhaps, barely exceeded the moderate limits of tolerably good sense, and he was, moreover, indolent and careless. Nevertheless, a good disposition, and certain liveliness of manner, had ensured him a great degree of popularity. He was a particular favourite of Lady Louisa, who was quite as proud of her nephew as she was of any of her children.

One of her most favourite speculations was a marriage between him and one of her daughters; and though she could never have been accused of doing any thing to promote it, she certainly bore it constantly in mind. Lady Malvern, before her marriage, had first been selected as the future duchess; the prospective coronet was next transferred to Agnes; and, now since her unfortunate engagement, it had been destined, by her sanguine mother, for the youthful brow of Marianne. This futile piece of castle-building was now sufficient to occupy and interest the weak and vacant mind of poor Lady Louisa, and a visit from the duke was consequently regarded not merely as the visit of a relation, but as an event upon which hung the favourite project of her life.

One morning the duke called, stayed with them a long time, good humouredly tried to be pleased with the quietness of their situation, which he pretended to believe was chosen out of consideration for Lady Louia's health, and promised to come and see them frequently. He talked chiefly to Agnes, and seemed much pleased with her, thereby causing no slight regret to Lady Louisa, who inwardly lamented the engagement, and her nephew's unprofitable waste of admiration on the wrong person. Of Marianne, whom he viewed

merely as a child, he took scarcely any notice; and Lady Louisa, almost felt angry with Agnes for engrossing an attention, by which she could never hope to profit.

The duke scarcely ventured to allude to the present distresses of the family; but almost the only part of their hardships which he gave any signs of perceiving, was the absence of amusement which it must entail upon Agnes; and his only act of practical kindness was directed to her. He thought she would like to ride, and wanted very much to lend her a horse, which he was sure would suit her.

"It will really," said he, to Lady Louisa, "be a kindness in my cousin Agnes to take it; for it carries a lady remarkably well, and would only be spoiled by being ridden by a man." Agnes, however, had nobody to accompany her, and the offer was declined.

The duke's visit had been a welcome one to all, and they looked forward with pleasure to the promised repetition of it; but week after week passed on, and he never came. Mr. Morton, whose misfortunes had rendered him keenly susceptible to the slightest shadow of neglect, became very indignant at this want of attention. He wrought himself into a bad opinion, not only of his young relative, but of society in general, and, with the perversity of disappointment, was but too ready to judge, that even those who had hitherto shown no disposition to desert him, would prove equally neglectful in the end. Meanwhile, the duke's omissions were such as he would perhaps have scarcely noticed under happier circumstances, nor must they, in fact, be regarded as proofs of an unfeeling disposition.

The duke as has been said, was perfectly, good natured, and willing to oblige; but he was also

careless, indolent, and forgetful. With him, to be out of sight, was too frequently to be out of mind: he had a large acquaintance; and, with scarcely any pursuit but that of amusement, he fancied that his time was unavoidably very much occupied. Had he once been made to understand that his discontinuance of attention to the Mortons was adding to the sense of their afflictions, he would have been much grieved, and would have hastened to repair his fault. But he had yet to learn the positive ills, that may result from mere sins of omission, and that the person who confines his thoughts to the selfish object of pleasing himself, may at the same time, "very innocently," as he would say, cause considerable pain to others.

The Duke of Swansea, had, however, an excuse, which, perhaps, in the opinions of some, may tend to exculpate him entirely. He had become a sudden and ardent admirer of one of the beauties of the day, and his adoration soon went to the full length of a proposal. He was accepted; and the matrimonial Alnascharism of poor Lady Louisa was fated to receive its sudden down-fall, from the announcement of this event one morning by Lady Malvern.

The Mortons received very frequent visits from Lady Malvern; but her presence did not often afford them much consolation. She was vain, weak, and frivolous, had no strength of mind, and seemed more oppressed by the sense of their calamities, than they even were themselves.—Spoiled by indulgence and prosperity, she rather aggravated their discontent, by overvaluing the importance of the advantages they had lost. She shuddered with an affectation of overstrained delicacy, at the horrors of their habitation, and wondered how they could exist in such a small

ill-furnished house, "so very, very far from every body." Her only modes of consolation were by talking to them as if their situations had remained unchanged,—proposing plans which were now unfeasible, and detailing the tittle-tattle of that gay world from which they were endeavouring to wean themselves. She pressed Agnes to enter into society, brought her invitations, and wished her to allow herself to be chaperoned as usual.

But Agnes resolutely declined mixing in the gaieties of general society. One of her motives was economy, a principle of self-denial, which, with her ample means, she little thought to have been so soon under the necessity of practising.—Her parents had now little to depend upon beyond her yearly allowance, which was all appropriated to their relief, and she had even parted with many valuable trinkets that she might contribute further to their comfort. Under these circumstances it was her object to reduce the expenses of the toilette, and abstain as much as she could from that costliness of attire which society would have required.

Lady Malvern could not, or would not, enter into the propriety of these considerations, and thought it strange and ridiculous that the heiress of thousands should stoop to the practice of such petty parsimony. She had frequent discussions with Agnes, on the subject of her unwillingness to go into society. Agnes thanked her for the kindness which induced her to press it, and assured her that she had no such wish.

"But that is so strange!" said Lady Malvern; "it is not natural at your age, not to wish to go to balls. It is what the world would call odd, and if it is odd it cannot be right."

"It might be odd," said Agnes, with a mourn-

ful smile, "if there was nothing to warrant my declining; but you must remember the peculiar circumstances in which we are placed."

"Yes, my dear, I do remember them; but I wish you would not allude to them so often. It is not necessary, and it is very distressing. Besides, things won't always remain as they are.—You know, you have said yourself, that you have hopes of making some arrangement."

"My fortune is not in my own hands."

"True, but you are to be married; and then—"

"It will be my husband's," replied Agnes, gravely.

The tone of her remark arrested for a while the train of Lady Malvern's thoughts. After a short pause, Agnes proceeded—"In the mean time, I wish to share, in every respect, the lot of our parents. They will necessarily be exposed to many privations of former pleasures. Society is among the enjoyments they must give up; and I think they will be more resigned if they see me bearing the same lot as themselves, and (as I hope I shall do) cheerfully. They will feel their misfortunes lighter; and I shall have a better right to comfort them, than if I were exempt from what they are obliged to bear, and could not know by experience how melancholy their situation is."

"That is very good in you, Agnes," said Lady Malvern, "and very kindly and properly meant; but, my dear creature, don't you think it will hurt my father and mother to suppose, (as they certainly must) that they are the means of debarring you from a great deal of amusement? Besides, if you went into society, you would be better able to entertain them. Think how delightful to return home from a party, and be able to tell them every thing you had seen and heard, and all the inquiries that had been made after them."

"I am afraid," said Agnes, sighing, "there would be little in ball-room inquiries that could give them much pleasure. Even if I amused them at the time, I should do them no kindness in the end. I will take care that they shall never have the pain of supposing that I have been deprived of pleasure by them. They well know that if I give up society, I do it voluntarily."

Lady Malvern was not convinced by the reasonableness of her sister's arguments; but she was struck with the admirable spirit of her self-devotion, and forbore to urge intreaties which she found to be unavailing.

CHAPTER XV.

La souveraineté parlementaire n'est au fait que la souveraineté du peuple, sortie du domaine de l'abstraction pour entrer dans celui de la réalité: ou plutôt elle est l'image terrestre de cette souveraineté de la raison à laquelle les hommes rendent hommage lorsque, par une convention salutaire, ils donnent force de loi à l'opinion de la majorité, pourvu que cette opinion se légitime en subissant l'épreuve d'une libre et publique discussion.

BARON DE STAEL. *Lettres sur l'Angleterre.*

MR. MORTON's resignation of the contest for Wichcombe was necessarily followed by the election of Lacy; and almost the whole time, since that event, had been passed by the latter in London, in attending to his parliamentary duties.—Lacy entered upon this new career under very favourable expectations. University honours, which had been, hitherto, the highest within his attainment, had shown him to be possessed of talent; and though it might reasonably be questioned, whether the objects, when gained, were commensurate with the exertion, they served, at any rate, as a tolerable criterion of his abilities. His talents were also tempered by moderation and a becoming diffidence in the unerringness of his own views. His parliamentary conduct was strictly in conformity with the liberality of his principles. He adhered to no particular party, and felt no magic, in the words, "Whig," or "Tory;" "Ministry," or "Opposition." Measures, not men, were his object. He saw, in the present organization of the state, the result of a long course of

slow and unremitting changes, and he knew no reason why the hand of innovation, which had been hitherto beneficial, should now be arrested. He foreboded no danger to the higher classes, from the increasing education of the lower; and believed that insurrections were more successfully fostered by ignorance than by knowledge. He saw a wide difference between a repeal of catholic disabilities, and an approbation of their tenets; thought them toweak, as a sect, to excite our apprehensions, and too strong, as a people, to be prudently repulsed. He considered, that were there influence such as their opponents believed, too much had been conceded already; and if not, why might not more be safely granted? He trusted that the energies and resources of the country might be best developed by free trade; was not sportsman enough to be blind to the evils of the existing Game Laws; and, though heir to a large landed property, was creditably disposed to listen to reason on the subject of corn.

Though possessed of a respectable share of eloquence, he did not wish to rush hastily into a display of oratory. He knew that the multifarious and weighty business of the House of Commons, did not allow it to be used, like an assembly for amateur debaters, for mere purposes of show or practice. He could not conscientiously speak, unless he had something new or important to say; and his good taste preserved him, from the commission of florid common-places.

Herbert's parliamentary career brought him into frequent contact with Sackville, who was also the representative of a borough; and he was enabled by this means, to form a truer estimate, of his character than he had hitherto done. He did not become privy to any instance of corruption in Sackville, or was able to convict him of political

profligacy; but he soon became sensible, that if he was really exempt from such offences, he was preserved by no other principle than prudence. There was an absence of high-mindedness in Sackville, a contempt of public spirit, and a disregard of beneficial measures, except in so far as they could be made subservient to the interests of a party. He delighted in artifice, and was proud of his knowledge of what he called parliamentary tactics. With him, to gull and overreach, were by no means a discreditable exercise of ability. He sympathized with the triumphs of successful chicanery, and never betrayed indignation or sorrow, on seeing honourable simplicity borne down by the efforts of a dexterous knave. He made a frequent parade of fine sentiments; but it was perceptible to the acute observer, that they came rather from the head than from the heart; and his real bias, inclined him to follow the tortuous paths of cunning.

These characteristics did not escape the quick perception of Lacy. From gratitude to Sackville for an act of deliverance, he felt bound in duty to put a favourable construction upon his words and actions; but he could not refuse to receive the evidence of his observation; and the more he saw of Sackville, the more strongly was he inspired with distrust. The conversation which once passed between himself and Agnes, then came to his recollection, and as her expressions respecting Sackville coincided in a remarkable degree with what he had now experienced, they tended to confirm his unfavourable impressions.

In connection with this train of thought, he remembered the suspicions once dropped by his father, respecting the probable chicanery practised to effect the engagement of marriage with Agnes; and there were circumstances, connected with other recent events, which almost seemed to justify the

belief of some treacherous underhand agency. The suspicions of Lacy were excited, and though he might sometimes mentally condemn them as uncharitable, they were not to be suppressed.

The success of Sackville's attempt to prejudice the mind of Mr. Morton against Lacy, by attributing to the latter a knowledge and approbation of the legal process, had been complete. The idea of Lacy's having plotted against Mr. Morton, was so artfully conveyed by Sackville to that gentleman, that he was not conscious that the first suggestion of it had not proceeded from himself. It was an impression which his former dislike of the Lacys, rendered him very prone to admit; and the idea being once entertained, Sackville dexterously dropped the character of the instigator, and irritated him by mock defences of his opponent, and feeble hopes that circumstances were not such as he suspected.

At length, when the impression had been sufficiently strengthened by treacherous resistance, he chose a fitting opportunity, and allowed the introduction of those confirmations which he had previously concerted with Allen. They amounted by no means to proofs, but they were so produced, as to have an equivalent effect upon the mind of Mr. Morton. Sackville knew that if any publicity were given to the accusation, Lacy would be able to clear himself, and it was necessary to deprive him of such an opportunity. For this purpose, he again wrought upon the mind of Mr. Morton, whose wayward feelings he could generally rule at pleasure. He impressed him with the impossibility of redress; the humiliation of an acknowledgment that he had been thus over-reached, and the malicious pleasure with which the world would triumph over the prostrate dupe, and hail the glories of successful treachery. He led Mr. Morton to feel

that it was better to bury his wrongs in his own bosom; and that as there was no evidence of that sort of unfairness on the part of Lacy which would tend to vitiate the election, his unavailing complaints would only serve to excite the derision of his opponent.

By these means, Sackville at the same time precluded the exculpation of Lacy, and embittered the enmity of Morton; and the latter made a positive determination, that nothing should induce him to see the man whom he now thought he had such just and ample cause for detesting. Lacy, ignorant of the feelings with which he was regarded, called twice at Mr. Morton's and was not admitted. The first denial he conceived to be accidental, but having been repulsed a second time, he began to question with himself, whether Mr. Morton objected to society, or had any peculiar grudge towards him. In this doubt he applied to Sackville. The answer was carelessly given, but it tended to reassure him.

"It must be shyness rather than resentment," said Sackville. "Why should he bear you any ill will? He can have nobody to thank for what has happened, but himself. The fact is, that his unfortunate circumstances have made him almost a recluse. He is ashamed of his present poverty, and does not like that it should be witnessed." This seemed a very reasonable explanation, and it was so naturally given, that Lacy saw no ground for distrusting its correctness.

CHAPTER XVI.

La ville est partagée en diverses sociétés, qui sont comme autant de petites républiques, qui ont leurs loix, leurs usages, leur argon, et leurs mots pour rire.

BRUYERE.

AMONG those whom Mr. Morton saw with most repugnance and self-upbraiding, were his humble relations the Bagshawes. They were his equals in family, though not in connection, and were now his superiors in wealth. They now stood almost in the same relative situation to him, in which he once appeared to his less affluent neighbours, and he viewed in them a practical satire on his former self. He felt a strange contrariety of feeling towards them, and hardly knew how they should be treated. His conscience accused him of having slighted them in his prosperous days; and pride, under the mask of a love of consistency, suggested that it would be hardly becoming to show much friendliness and attention now to those whom he had formerly avoided.

But then, they had once done him a kindness; and were still truly anxious to assist him, and they evinced such genuine good-heartedness, and total forgetfulness of all previous slights, that Mr. Morton's pride gave way, and he could not refrain from a gracious reception. It was perhaps fortunate that they were vulgar; for the equilibrium was thereby more than restored. Extractions being equal, Mr.

Morton would have had nothing but alliance to set in the scale against the influence of their wealth, if he could not have borne down their vulgarity by the *eclat* of his own refinement. Had they been well-bred people, they might, notwithstanding their plebian name, have had some chance of mingling slightly in that class of society to which he had been admitted; but, as it was, their manners rendered it impossible, and his jealousy was thereby appeased. He would on no account have owned, even to himself, that he had thus regarded them in the possible situation of rivals; but, nevertheless, such were his feelings.

Lady Louisa, who troubled her head much less about the Bagshawes, never viewed them in that light. Her consciousness of high and undisputed rank, entirely exempted her from such comparisons. She did not conceive it possible that Mrs. Bagshawe and her daughter should ever quit the character of respectful inferiors, and she was satisfied. She was quite conscious of their vulgarity; but it was not a physical annoyance, and she was not acutely sensible of any others. She had occasionally gone so far as to think it a pity that her husband should have such low relations—but that was more his affair than hers; and it did not appear to her that she had any reason for being violently ashamed of them.

Mr. Bagshawe, since we saw him at Huntley Park, had received a considerable accession of fortune by the death of one of his relations. He had at length resigned the profession of an attorney, which he had been latterly following rather lazily; and, in obedience to the urgent and oft-repeated representations of his wife and daughters, had, early in the spring, quitted the legal quarter of the town, and given up his old neighbours and a good house for a worse and dearer one in Lower

Grosvenor Street. He himself was not ambitious of change, and rather regretted it, when he compared the respective comforts of the two residences: but the ladies absolutely refused to stoop to such petty considerations. The situation, they thought, must amply compensate for all inferiority. Within sight of Grosvenor-Square, and in the great thoroughfare from thence to Bond-Street, even a hovel must be preferable to the best of houses in those regions which have been proclaimed in parliament as unknown. To Mrs. Bagshawe it seemed like a change of being, and she felt as if every thing that society could offer was now within her reach. Who shall describe the pleasure with which she viewed her new direction! She was even half sorry that the printer of her visiting card had deprived her of the pleasure of writing it there.

I cannot find that in any other city, ancient or modern, this "pride of place" has acquired such strength as in London. Wonderful is the magic which lies in those words, a "good situation;" laudible the discrimination of some of its inhabitants. It would be almost possible, with their assistance, to make out a scale of the comparative gentility of the streets and squares. The claims of the latter would be easily settled. St. James's and Grosvenor-Square would look down like rival potentates from a proud height of dignity on their humbler brethren of Berkley, Hanover, and Portman; and these, in return, may discharge their contempt on the minor northern fry of Cavendish; Manchester, Bryanstone, and Montague. But these can still treat others as inferiors. Many and nice are the gradations of square-hood: numerous are its steps of precedence. Even the distant Finsbury, separated from the "world" like ancient Britain, may have neighbours, in that remote and half-discovered region, with whom it may

think it "foul scorn" to be classed; and these again may have inferiors, the knowledge of whose existence has not yet travelled westward of the meridian of Charing-cross.

"Tell me your company, and I will tell what you are," says an adage of no mean wisdom; but London would seem to scorn such extensive data, and limits the inquiry to "Tell me your street." At the same time, singular to say, it is almost the only place where vicinity hardly ever produces acquaintance: it would rather seem to repel it; for a next-door neighbour is proverbially unknown. Wherein, then, consists the mighty magic of situation? In truth we are somewhat insensible to its influence; but we know that many feel it strongly. Difficult as it may sometimes be to define the peculiar advantages of what is called a good situation, it is easy to trace the feeling which assigns such false importance to these minute and trivial distinctions. Look at the dense throng of London society, and this will furnish the explanation. It is a scene of desperate rivalry, where crowds press on like mariners from a wreck, filling to the utmost the frail boats that are to bear them to the shore, and each feeling that he should be safe if his neighbour were drowned. It is an over crowded arena, where advancement is open to all who choose to struggle for it. There are no broad, impassible lines of demarcation; nothing that compels the aspirant to despair of admission to any extent of social honours: every claim, however trivial, may conduce to the desired success; and the pretensions of each individual are often made up of a number of particulars, too insignificant to be separately considered. Thus the resources of vanity are taxed to the utmost; and he who can assert no other superiority over his immediate rivals, who are running with him the race of society, will

probably discover that—he lives in a better situation.

The Bagshawes, in their migration, did but follow the feeling of the million; but they (and principally the lady) had augured too much from the happy transition. Mrs. Bagshawe seemed to have thought that their change of neighbourhood would necessarily be followed by a change of society: but she had not sufficiently considered that there is no neighbourhood in London; and two months had passed without any flattering results. She looked wistfully at the Court Guide, where she saw with pleasure their homely name figuring in the list by the side of titles; but she found that she was quite as far from any acquaintance with these personages as when two miles of building lay between them, Knockers were plied to the right and left: but such tantalizing peals seldom thundered at her door; and though the progress of her carriage at night was often checked by the throngs that flocked to neighbouring routs, she was not a whit the more invited. She also saw less than formerly of her old acquaintance in the distant quarter that she had quitted. She questioned herself whether she had been guilty of any neglect, and feared, in the simplicity of her heart, that her friends, might accuse her of growing "fine." But they had not paid her the compliment of so unmerited a suspicion. She had gained nothing in their eyes by her migration; and if they now called upon her less frequently, it was for this plain reason, that she was farther out of their way.

The house to which the Bagshawes now most willingly bent their course was that of the Mortons. Pity for their misfortunes produced a greater friendliness of disposition towards them, and they felt a good-natured pleasure in paying them attention. A disciple of Rochefoucault might per-

haps have discovered that there was something in the misfortunes of the Mortons that was not entirely displeasing to them; and it might also be suggested that they hoped to profit by their relations' long acquaintance with the fashionable world. But it is an ungracious task to extract the little selfish alloy that links within the golden promise of a praise-worthy action.

Civility's last best vent in London is always an invitation to dinner. Routs and balls are for bowing acquaintance; but a dinner is the pledge of intimacy. As such the Bagshawes viewed it; and as such they proposed it to the Mortons. Their proposal, however, had been twice made without success. Lady Louisa pleaded ill health, and Mr. Morton had an insuperable objection to stirring from home. At length, during the Easter recess, Tom Morton being come up from Oxford, and Mr. Bagshawe's "eldest hope" from Cambridge, it was suggested, that perhaps Miss Morton would not object to accompany her brother, and dine in Lower Grosvenor Street. It was a proposal that was not much liked either by Agnes or her parents; but a wish to avoid giving offence to the Bagshawes induced them to comply.

CHAPTER XVII.

Cette fatuité de quelques femmes de la ville, que cause en elles une mauvaise imitation de celles de la cour, est quelque chose de pire que la grossièreté des femmes du peuple, et que la rusticité des villageoises: elle a sur toutes deux l'affectation de plus.

BRUYERE.

On the appointed day, at a late hour (for the Bagshawes, thinking lateness fashionable, determined to be correct in that at least,) Agnes and her brother prepared to Lower Grosvenor Street. They were very cordially received: Mr. Bagshawe exerted his best powers of speech to give the welcome; and his lady, glowing under a large red turban, as gorgeous as a full blown peony, squeezed the small white fingers of Agnes, between her own fat hot hands, and dragged her off to the fire-side. She then introduced her immediately to a heavy-looking elderly couple of the name of Jones, who were said to have remembered seeing her when, as Mrs. Bagshawe said, exemplifying by action, she was "not *so high*."

Who among our readers, lately arrived at womanhood, or manhood, will not sympathize with Agnes? Few of the minor miseries that wait on introductions are more annoying than the being presented, or rather exhibited, to under-bred people who had seen you when you were a child. Topic and interest are all on their side; and you, the unhappy presentée, have nothing to say, and little to

feel, except the oppressive difficulty of being sufficiently grateful for the extent of their memory, and the curiosity with which they regard you. Then come the personal observations—the growth—the likeness—and the alteration—and the "never should have known you;" or the assurances of instantaneous recognition; to neither of which remarks have you any thing to reply; and the good people con you over as unceremoniously as if you were still the child they left you, and seem almost surprised to find that you behave like a grown up person.

All this did Agnes undergo from Mr. and Mrs. Jones; a Mr. and Mrs. Jones whom she was not conscious of having ever seen before, and of whose history she knew nothing. She envied her brother for having "bloomed unseen" in his days of childhood, and for his present exemption from all recognition. In consideration of her own distresses, she could hardly feel inclined to reprove the repulsivensss of his bow to them, and the abruptness with which he turned away from them to talk to Richard Bagshawe, whom half a year passed at Cambridge, since we met him last at Huntley Park, had in some degree tended to improve.

College life was a topic of common interest to the two young men, and they began to discuss the comparative merits of the sister Universities. The conversation that ensued might have astonished an uninitiated listener, who should expect to hear English flowing, in its utmost purity, from the lips of two students fresh from these celebrated seats of learning. But the English of their halls and combination-rooms bears too often a comparative purity with the Latin of the schools. Universities have their shibboleth, as well as the Ring. These two young men were both in their freshman's year, and were rather unnecessarily proud of their newly-

acquired jargon. They talked of men with whom they had *wined;* the factious struggles of "Town" and "Gown;" the necessary evils of "scouts" and "gyps;" "battles," meaning those of the buttery; and "commons," not the third estate, but of that kind which are sometimes called short. Then spake they of their studies. The Cantab ridicule a Johnian, who *muzzed* hard the last term for a Senior *Op.*, that he might stand for *the* medal, but only got a *wooden spoon;* and the Oxonian calmly reproved the presumption of a man who had *taken up the Poets* for his "Little go," and, after all, was *under the line.* The administration of justice was compared. The case was cited of a Brazen-Nose man who was threatened with *rustication* for merely *cutting* hall and chapel; and the sister University supplied an instance of one who was *put out of sizings and commons* for refusing to *cap* the dean. Various other cases were produced and compared, including crimes not mentioned in the Decalogue, and punishments the names of which are not to be found in Johnson's dictionary.

While this classical dialogue was taking place, Mrs. Bagshawe, who had made Agnes fully acquainted with Mr. and Mrs. Jones, was entertaining all three with full particulars respecting the purchase of their present house. Its conveniences, appurtenances, lease, ground-rent, and former possessor, all had their places in her narration; and the detail might have been wire-drawn to a still greater length, if her attention had not been suddenly directed to the more interesting subject of her neighbours. The second Miss Bagshawe, who had been amusing herself with looking out of the window, broke in upon her tale by exclaiming aloud that Lord John Wharton was just returning from his morning ride.

"Dear me, how late he is!" said Mrs. Bagshawe, with all the interest of an intimate acquaintance. "But he is generally late; and which horse is he riding, Lucy? Is it the gray or the black?

"The bay," said Miss Lucy, who seemed to have been a critical observer of Lord John's horses.

"I am sorry it isn't the gray," said her mother, "that Mrs. Jones might have taken a look at it. His lordship rides a charming grey horse sometimes, Ma'am. He is a very elegant young man, is Lord John; and Lady Jane, his sister, is a very elegant young woman. She goes out a riding too. They live close by at their father's house, the Marquis of Northallerton's, next door but one, Ma'am, and that is the reason we see so much of them."

"You are acquainted with them, then?" said Agnes.

"Why," said Mrs. Bagshawe, with a slight degree of hesitation, "we know them very well—by sight; but I cannot exactly say that we know them, at present, to speak to; but some of our servants are quite intimate with some of the marquis's people, and we see and hear a good deal of them, one way or another."

Agnes felt more inclined to blush than smile at the rude notion which poor Mrs. Bagshawe evidently entertained, that the intimacy of the servants in the respective households, should be likely to promote the acquaintance of the masters; and she feared lest her deep-dyed vulgarity should be too apparent even to the dull perceptions of Mr. and Mrs. Jones. But one glance at their sober countenances was sufficient to re-assure her, and she earnestly hoped that no person of a more sensitive temperament might be added to the party.

At this moment, Mr. Bagshawe pulled out his watch, said something, with an air at once waggish and complaining, of its being "half past dinner time, and time to dine again," and added, that he hoped Mr. Lacy would not prove himself Mr. *Lazy*, but would soon favour them with his presence. Agnes quite forgot to pay to this inimitable pun, the expected compliment of a smile, in her surprise at the very unwelcome recurrence of such a name, and she found upon inquiry that it was the very Mr. Lacy whom, under present circumstances, she was most unwilling to meet. In addition to her natural reluctance to see the vulgarity of her relations, the Bagshawes, exposed to his discriminating eye, she had many other reasons for wishing to avoid him. Bound as she was to Sackville, to whom she could feel no attachment, she did not wish to be exposed to the society of him whom she so strongly preferred.

The recent misfortunes of her family had made her shrink from the first collision with every person who had known them in happier days, and above all, she had been taught to consider Lacy as the secret cause of their late misfortunes. It was Sackville's aim to prejudice her mind, no less than her father's, and he had not been utterly unsuccessful. She earnestly wished to think the accusations untrue; but she had nothing to oppose to those circumstances which Sackville seemed anxious rather to conceal and palliate, than to exaggerate or obtrude. Both in obedience to her father's wishes, and out of charity towards Lacy, she had abstained from mentioning the mischievous interference of which he was suspected. She longed to hear his vindication, but she knew not how to obtain it, for it was difficult to inform him of the feelings with which he was regarded by her father, without incurring the danger of another hostile meeting.

Her father's irritability had been increased by his misfortunes; and previous occurrences had led her to fear that an angry altercation might terminate as seriously as before.

She therefore considered it the part of prudence, to withhold from Lacy all information of the charges which had been brought against him; but at the same time to try to discover how far he was conscious of having merited an injurious accusation. Scarcely had she decided how to receive him, than a carriage was heard to stop at the door —then a knocking—then footsteps on the stairs, and Lacy was announced.

After accosting Mr. Bagshawe, who met him at the door, Lacy's eyes were naturally directed first towards the lady of the house, and it was not until he had exchanged a few sentences with her, that he looked round at the rest of the company. Then it was that, turning from Mrs. Bagshawe with the intention of bestowing a bow of acknowledgment on her daughters, he first became sensible of the presence of Agnes. He almost started when he saw her, and visibly changed colour; and surprise and embarrassment were apparent in his countenance. Agnes perhaps looked more composed; but her heart beat violently, and she felt as if she could hardly breathe.

There was much passing in the minds of each that must tend to render this meeting agitating and painful. The duel, the election, Lacy's engagement to Miss Hartley, and the discovery of Mr. Morton's embarrassment, had all taken place since the last time that they had even seen each other, and each of these circumstances brought with it a long train of agitating thoughts. The last time they had met, except in the midst of crowds, was on the morning after the ball at Westcourt, and in that interview they had allowed their mutual sen-

timents to escape, and had uttered words that could not be recalled or forgotten. They were each conscious of the necessity that existed for repressing all indication of what they felt, and of entrenching themselves behind the defences of frigid politeness, and the safest common-place.

It seemed difficult to avoid subjects possessing any degree of interest to either, that might not endanger their mutual composure. Inquiries after Mr. Morton and Lady Louisa were timidly made by Lacy, and very briefly answered by Agnes. Sackville's was an interdicted name, as well as that of Miss Hartley. Lord and Lady Malvern might more safely be approached, but a conversation beginning with them had led somehow or other to the Applebys at whose house Lacy and Agnes had first met. They talked to each other as if it were a duty, a penance, which, however unwilling, they were bound to perform. To Lacy, it would have seemed a sort of sacrilege to turn his attention from Agnes to any other person, and he had not the power to quit her side, though conscious that he wished it.

But Agnes herself dispelled the painful charm that held him. Her brother was standing near him, and she begged to introduce him to Lacy, and the latter then talked to him till dinner was announced. Neither Agnes nor Lacy wished to be near each other at table. Agnes accepted, with more pleasure than she could ever have expected, the arm of Mr. Jones; and Lacy, in spite of Mrs. Bagshawe's hints to him to "take Miss Morton," persisted in offering his services to the lady of the mansion. They succeeded in being far asunder, and were as widely separated as was possible. They were even favoured in their object, by the unnecessary size of the table, and two blanks left by defaulting guests, whose absence Mr. Bagshawe feelingly deplored.

Agnes had been too much occupied by the many reflections which Lacy's presence had conjured up, to think with uneasiness of the impression which the vulgarity of her relations was likely to make upon him. It must, however, be said in justice to the Bagshawes, that they appeared to much greater advantage at their own table than elsewhere, and that their entertainment was rather creditable, and served very tolerably, to support the pretensions which they thought suitable to their new abode. Their plate looked as well as if it had been a hundred years in the family, and their cook had given them as good a dinner as if they had been fashionables of the first distinction. The "pomp and circumstance" of polite society are too much at the command of wealth, to be denied to the monied vulgar; and, consequently, those who seek for characteristic distinctions must generally look for them rather in the persons themselves than in their tables and establishments.

The present scene suggested a similar thought to Lacy when he was addressed by Mrs. Bagshawe, who asked him to take "a few *grass*" (meaning asparagus) with his chicken. Conversation had not entirely slumbered. Mr. Bagshawe had enlivened his end of the table by firing off, very successfully, a favourite joke upon a saddle of mutton.

"Mr. Jones, do you like it cut saddle-wise, or bridle-wise?" said the wily Mr. Bagshawe.

"Saddle-wise, if you please," said the unsuspicious Mr. Jones.

"I like it cut bridle-wise," was the prompt reply, "for then I am sure to have a *bit* in my mouth."

After some reflection, Mr. Jones rewarded the punster with a hearty laugh, and ended by protesting that he had never heard that joke before. Mr. Jones was no joker, but he did his best, in his

way, to be entertaining and instructive. He was one of those persons who have a genius for doubting; and he favoured the company with many indications of his peculiar talent. He doubted whether the world was grown wiser: whether Macadamization would succeed in streets: whether the Whigs would ever come into office; whether popery was not as dangerous as ever: and whether such a town as London had any right to a university.

Meanwhile Mrs. and Miss Bagshawe had been ranging with Lacy through the classic land of Italy. They had been at Florence, Rome, and Naples; and though they could not talk of their "Raphaels, Correggios, and stuff," so fluently as Mr. Bagshawe, they had much to say on the society, scenery and accommodations.

"We were at *Room*, Mr. Lacy," said Mrs. Bagshawe. "I suppose you have been there. Every body goes to *Room* now-a-days. It is a delightful place in the season. To my mind it is as good as Bath or Cheltenham every bit,— only there are no waters to drink—it does not come up to them there to be sure."

"That is very true," said Lacy, suppressing a smile with some difficulty. "I had never considered that. What then do you think can be the reason why so many from our country go there?"

"I suppose they go for the ceremonies," replied Mrs. Bagshawe. "Dear heart! what a sight of ceremonies there are! We made a point of going to them all. You know the saying, Mr. Lacy, 'Do at *Room* as they do at *Room*.' And so, as I said, we made a point of going to all the ceremonies. We saw horses blessed, and lambs blessed, and palm trees, and candles, and I don't know what besides: and we saw a doll carried round the Harry Scaly Church, with drums and trumpets

playing before it, like any thing, and go out and bless the people. What a deal of blessing there is there! As Mr Bagshawe used to say, it is a blessed place altogether. But the Holy Week!—that was the finest thing of all: and I believe I may safely say that I went through every bit of it. I cannot think now how I bore it; but I believe I am pretty tough. A gentleman said to me, 'Ma'am, you must have the strength of a horse,' and I don't believe it was merely a compliment. Really there used to be terrible crowding and squeezing sometimes. Eliza, do you remember the day when the Pope waited at table upon those pilgrim people?—What work we had to get to see him! There was a little box, like a pen for poultry, stuck up in the middle of the room, and I knew it was the best place for seeing, so up I went. Somebody told me it was meant for the grandees. 'Oh!' says I, 'a fig for your grandees—I am not come all this way to be put about by them!' So on we pushed, didn't we, Eliza? I didn't see any thing after all; but I *did* get in, I will say *that*."

Eliza, whose disposition seemed less enterprising than her mother's, said, with a languid air, that she doubted whether they had been repaid for their exertions. "What I enjoyed most," said she, "were our parties of pleasure."

"Oh, yes, the parties of pleasure," said Mrs. Bagshawe. "I shall never forget that night at the Coliseum. We went there by moonlight, Mr. Lacy, and took a cold collation with us, and had our supper, quite comfortable; and a very merry party we were. Eliza, do you remember Mr. Sharp carrying off a bottle of soda water into one of the dark passages, and making the cork fly, and groaning, to make us think that somebody had shot himself? And then his telling us all about the banditti coming down and hiding themselves there?

And then you know, you and Miss Spratt went to look for an echo, and Dick, a rogue, stole round the other way and made one; and when you hallooed; he hallooed, and when you clapped your hands, he clapped his hands. I have laughed many a good time since with thinking of that scheme of Dick's. Dick, we were talking about you. Do you remember what fun you had at the Coliseum?"

"Ay, precious good fun," said Dick, and went on eating as before.

"It is a curious place, that Coliseum," pursued Mrs. Bagshawe, turning again to Lacy. "If you ever observed, Mr. Lacy, they have built up that outer wall afresh at the two ends. I doubt whether they will ever be able to finish it all round. They generally do things by halves in Italy."

"But; mamma, it is a ruin," interposed Miss Bagshawe; "you know it was never meant to be finished."

"Well—true—I suppose it was not. I cannot say that I am very partial to ruins. I don't think many of them are very ornamental. Some folks are very fond of them. What is your taste, Mr. Lacy?"

"The more perfect a building is, the better I like it," said Lacy.

"Well, that is precisely my way of thinking," continued Mrs. Bagshawe, pleased at the supposed accordance of their tastes. She then proceeded to touch upon the society of Rome and other Anglo-Italian cities, and afforded Lacy a good deal of amusement by the peculiarity of her views, and the many strange anecdotes with which her remarks were interlarded. They might, perhaps, have afforded amusement to some of *our* readers, but a taste for personality is too much the literary vice of the day; and we do not wish to indulge

the growing mania even by giving insertion to Mrs. Bagshawe's *on-dits*.

Dinner at length was ended, and so was the sedentary conclave held by the gentleman afterwards, one of those reverential tributes to the wisdom of our ancestors, which we trust the good sense and sobriety of the present age will soon induce it to discontinue.

Lacy left the dining-room with a strong desire to engage Agnes again in conversation. Her presence seemed to give him pain, and yet there was an attraction in it, which he could not resist, and much had occurred to his mind during their separation at the dinner table, which he now wished to say. He thought he perceived in her manner a more than necessary degree of reserve, and he longed to penetrate the motives, and discover what were the feelings with which she really regarded him.

The experiment was difficult and hazardous, considering their respective situations. But at the moment he thought not of that, but merely of the indulgence of what seemed a reasonable curiosity. Some arrivals had been heard during the stay of the gentleman in the dining room; and Lacy trusted that this influx might favour his object, and enable him to escape more easily from the clutches of Mrs. and Miss Bagshawe.

On entering the drawing-room, he found many fresh visiters; and after undergoing one or two introductions at the hands of Mrs. Bagshawe, he looked round for Agnes. But unhappily he found her quite unapproachable, closely hemmed in by other ladies, so that he could have said nothing to her above a whisper that would not have been audible to the whole coterie. He also unguardedly came within the influence of Mrs. Bagshawe's notice and was again compelled to talk and listen to her.

She began upon the subject of music, preparatory, as it afterwards appeared to a performance by Miss Bagshawe. "I was thinking, Mr. Lacy," said she, "whether I had ever seen you at the Opera."

Lacy believed not, having never had the pleasure of meeting her there.

"Why, no," said Mrs. Bagshawe; "and indeed, at present, you would not know where to look for us; for the fact is, we have no regular box. I believe we must have one next season; and, indeed," pursued she, putting on a prudent face, and endeavouring to mask the loftiness of her aspirations under the plea of a little economy, "I am not sure that it would not be the cheaper way, if one is to go to the Opera much, for boxes are *ris* of late, and there is no end of dabbing about, now a box here, and now a box there, and one is never settled and comfortable. What do you advise, Sir?"

"To take a box for the season," said Lacy, "if you prefer it."

"Well, I am sure I am glad to hear you think so. We cannot come on without the Opera no how. I hope you like Madame Pasta, Sir. I cannot agree with any body that does not like Madame Pasta. I only wish she would not stick so to her Italian. I do long to hear her sing a right good English song. Why cannot she give us 'God save the King,' and 'Rule Britannia,' now and then, like Madame Catalani? Are you partial to English songs, Sir?"

Lacy said he was.

"Eliza, Mr. Lacy, likes English songs: cannot you sing us one or two? There is a song I used to sing—'Tell me, bubbling echo, why.'"

"*Babbling* echo," said Miss Bagshawe.

"It used to be 'bubbling' in my book," said

her mother; "but never mind the words, only sing it."

But the young lady remonstrated, and said she could not sing English music; she had not learned the style; she was only equal to the easy cadences of Rossini; and, acccordingly, she sat down, and trilled away at an air out of 'Semiramide.'

The air was well chosen, being a noisy one, and consequently imposing no check upon conversation. Soft plaintive airs are decidedly most prejudicial to the interests of general society. They produce attention, spread an awful sense of decorum over the company, and lull them gradually into silence. They are a shameful infringement upon the liberty of the tongue—whereas nobody is afraid to chatter under the cover of a spirited bravura.

The music had caused a movement in the room. Those who were tired of their neighbours took advantage of the opportunity to change their places; and among these was Agnes. Lacy was attentive to the opportunity which these new arrangements might give him. He saw a vacant seat by the side of that which Agnes had taken, and he immediately occupied it.

"I am sorry," said he, lowering his voice so as to be heard only by her, "not to have had the pleasure of seeing Mr. Morton since our meeting at the election. I hope he knows that I took the liberty of calling upon him twice."

"My father knows it," replied Agnes; "and if he has not acknowledged your civility, I hope you can excuse him. You know our present circumstances—I need not try to disguise them—they have depressed him a good deal, and made him rather averse to society, and less attentive to form than before."

"I can easily imagine it," said Lacy; "but I hope you will not think that I was induced to speak

by any foolish stickling for ceremony. Pray, if you can, give Mr. Morton to understand that I shall not wish to draw him into any sort of return. Perhaps I ought to apologize for having ventured to intrude; but we met last as opponents. It was that circumstance which made me anxious to see him."

"Had you, then, reason to suppose that he would bear you any ill will?" said Agnes.

"God forbid!" replied Lacy; "nor do I see any foundation for such an idea. The contest was conducted with as little warmth as was possible; and we shook hands on the day of our last meeting. But still, we were opponents; and, having so met, I was desirous of seeing him again. Do not, however, suppose that I am inclined to press it. Only tell me that you think a visit would be considered intrusive, and I will abstain for the future."

Agnes looked perplexed.

"I am not authorized," said she, "to tell you any thing of the kind; but I hope you will not be offended if I give you my own impressions. They are, that my father, under present circumstances, had rather not see you. He scarcely allows himself to be visible to any but his particular friends."

She turned away her head after she had said this, as if wishing to put a stop to the conversation; and presently rose and walked to the instrument. She soon afterwards made her departure, without having afforded Lacy any further opportunity of addressing her; and he himself, having then lost the only object which made the party tolerable to him, presently followed her example.

CHAPTER XVIII.

True virtue is like precious odours—sweeter the more incensed and crushed.

BACON.

LACY felt, with sorrow, that his former, and now hopeless attachment to Agnes, was strongly awakened by the past interview. He had seen her in a new point of view, and one in which she was especially calculated to interest his feelings. He looked back to the period when she first won his affections. He remembered how the brilliant fascination of her beauty had been heightened by the elegant vivacity of her manners, and the playful spirit of her conversation. These were now absent; but, in their place, there was a dignified, yet plaintive composure, a charm which the hand of sorrow had softened rather than dimmed, and which seemed to make her image sink still deeper into his heart. Like the calm and mournful beauty of a moonlight scene, it possessed a more enchaining interest than all the sunny blaze of her former attractions. Something might, perhaps, be attributed to the circle in which he met her. He thought he was seeing her to a disadvantage; but he was mistaken. The effect of contrast only rendered her natural elegance more conspicuous.

There was a superiority about Agnes which was strongly felt by the Bagshawes, and never so much as now. Miss Bagshawe, with all, those uneasy

aspirations after elegance and fashion, which, in half-bred people, are apt to lead to affectation, was tolerably quick and observant. She had long since entertained a jealous sense of the superior refinement of her cousin; but at that time Agnes had great advantages in point of society and connections, and had been raised upon a pedestal of fashion which precluded any thing like a fair comparison; and Miss Bagshawe could be comforted by the reflection that, but for these adventitious aids, the superiority might be very doubtful; and that, if places had been changed, the scale might even turn in her favour. But now the anticipated change was almost made. *They* were in possession of increased affluence, and living in a fashionable quarter, while the Mortons were depressed to poverty, and buried in the homely seclusion of the Alpha Cottages. Agnes had renounced society, and had never in her conversation made any allusion to the gaieties of the season. Miss Bagshawe, though never seen at parties that were at all of a select description, had made good use of her eyes at the Park, at the Opera, and at a crowded charity ball, which she had attended the week before, and had gained a tolerable knowledge of the exterior of most persons of distinction, and could talk about them almost as fluently as if they were her intimate acquaintance. She had noticed several remarkable flirtations—could tell how Lady Such-a-one looked—knew, by sight, most of the patronesses for the last fancy ball, and could mention what ladies belonged to such and such quadrilles—was *au fait* on the subject of what was or what was not worn at present, and could support her opinion, in case of need, by citing the example of the Duchess of So-and-so. She had also been abroad, while Agnes had not. In short, she now seemed to have many advantages over her cousin,

and to be in every respect qualified—aided, as she was, by costlier attire—to be the more brilliant person of the two.

Yet all this availed her nothing. The superiority was still as conspicuous as before; and it was the more striking because it seemed to be preserved unconciously, and without effort. That Agnes should be able to renounce and disregard all to which Miss Bagshawe was hopelessly aspiring, was also a reflection that conveyed a strong and humiliating sense of the real distance which still existed between them. But her admiration of Agnes was no longer blended with envy of her superior advantages; on the contrary, pity for her present trials served to convert it into generous regard.

Lacy's parting interview with Agnes was not entirely satisfactory, though there was perhaps nothing in her words to which he could attach an unpleasant import. He was disquieted, less by what she said than by what she had failed to say. There was also a measured coldness, a careful selection of phrase, differing widely from her usual address, an unwillingness to re-assure him, and a chilling reserve of manner, which induced him to surmise that in the domestic circle of the Mortons his name was not received as one of happy omen.

These thoughts pursued him long after he had quitted the presence of Agnes. With a view to satisfy his mind, he called upon Mr. Bagshawe, whom he knew to have frequent communication with the Mortons. He spoke to him in a confidential tone; he mentioned the long period of coolness which had existed between the families; the duel with Mr. Morton; their opposition at the election; Mr. Morton's present unwillingness to see him; and the irritable nature of his disposition. He then stated his own fears lest that gentleman should conceive himself to have any sufficient

grounds for ill will, and indulge his former feelings of dislike. He entreated him to discover, as delicately as he could, whether any such feelings existed, and assured him that in so doing he might consider himself as acting the part of a mediator between them.

Mr. Bagshawe, who, in spite of his affectation and pompous airs in society, had a good deal of shrewdness, which had been sharpened by his legal practice, entered readily into Lacy's ideas, and promised to do his best to set his mind at ease upon the point in question. It was undoubtedly Lacy's attachment to Agnes, excited anew by their late meeting, which rendered him so sensitively solicitous of the good opinion of her family, and so easily wounded by her apparent coldness. He dared not own his sentiments even to himself, plighted as he now was to another. Led away by the generosity and delicacy of his feelings, which, during a period of illness, had been so unfairly wrought upon to engage himself to one whom he could not love, he had often bitterly regretted the fancied necessity of his sacrifice. Time and cool observation had also rendered him somewhat sceptical as to the extent of that attachment which Miss Hartley was supposed to feel for him. Still nothing had occurred which warranted a breach of the engagement; and though the parting, when he went up to London after the election, had been conducted with a very philosophical spirit of composure, they had since that time maintained the proprieties of correspondence with sufficient regularity, and had contrived to write more tenderly than they had ever found it possible to speak.

The motives by which Lacy and Agnes were each of them led to dispose of their hands in opposition to their affections, were, viewed as sacrifices, certainly meritorious; but they involved an infringement of obligations, perhaps higher than

those which they were then regarding. The marriage vow is a solemn engagement to "love and honour;" and it may be questioned whether, under any circumstances, of however urgent a nature, it can properly be entered into by those who feel a distrust of their own ability to fulfil its important injunctions.

But this balance of duties is too nice and difficult to be settled satisfactorily by any but the calm observer. They who are themselves interested in the result, are ever liable to be swayed by feeling, rather than by judgment; and their errors, if they are not of the heart, must be treated with comparative leniency by those who, with the best intentions, may still be weak and erring as themselves.

One morning, about a week after Lacy's meeting with Agnes, he received a visit from Mr. Bagshawe, who came to tell him the result of an interview with Mr. Morton. After tantalizing Lacy for some time, with a wordy account of the adroitness with which he brought the conversation to turn upon him, he proceeded to unfold the state of Mr. Morton's sentiments.

Here Lacy stopped him. "Excuse my interruption," he said; "but I beg that you will let me first assure you, that I have no wish to hear any thing that has been mentioned by Mr. Morton under the pledge of secrecy. I am certain that you can have no intention to commit any such breach of confidence: I do not, therefore, speak with reference to you, but with a view to clear myself. I could not bear that you should, by possibility, conceive that my intentions were less honourable, than I am sure your conduct will be."

Mr. Bagshawe assured him that he was bound by no pledge to withhold any thing that he was now going to mention. He then stated that he had found great displeasure to exist against him in

the mind of Mr. Morton; and that the cause of this, was a belief that the execution of the writ had been an electioneering measure, timed by his direction, so as to trouble and defeat the opposite party; that the suing creditor was the brother-in-law of one of the Wichcombe burgesses, who was most warm in his opposition to Mr. Morton; and that a letter had been seen by Mr. Morton, which proved the existence of a plot against him, and Lacy's participation in it.

Mr. Bagshawe could not learn more than that such a letter existed. It was not in Mr. Morton's possession; and that gentleman would not tell to whom it had been written, or in whose hands he had seen it.

Lacy was astonished, and shocked to find himself considered guilty of so gross a piece of treachery. The circumstance of the letter also threw a more unpleasant light upon the subject, and seemed to indicate that his own character had been deliberately undermined. He knew that no letter existed which could, with any truth, tax him even with a previous knowledge of the execution which was hanging over Mr. Morton; and it was therefore evident, that the one alluded to had been prepared with a malicious intention.

How to clear himself was now the question.—He first thought of requiring from Mr. Morton a distinct statement of the charges against him, and the foundations on which they rested; but it occurred to him, that this demand might possibly be refused; and as a serious quarrel would then be the inevitable consequence, he resolved to dispense with this measure, until he had previously tried more cautious and less obtrusive methods of justification.

In the prosecution of these, we must now leave him, and direct our attention to other circumstances which were occurring in the mean time.

CHAPTER XIX.

Throughout the world, if it were sought,
Fayre words ynoughe a man shall fynde:
They be good chepe, they cost right nought,
Their substance, it is only wynde;
But well to say, and so to meane,
That swete accord is seldome sene.

SIR T. WYATT.

EASTER was now come. No amelioration appeared in the circumstances of the Mortons; and Agnes, who had hoped that time would render her parents more reconciled to their situation, was doomed in this to be disappointed. The first shock of their distress had made them indifferent to many minor points of comfort; and they had steeled themselves to the necessity of bearing even more than they had to endure, and secretly gloried in their petty heroism. But these feelings had subsided; they had leisure to review their wants, and contrast their present with their former life; and, day after day, they appeared more desirous to forget their poverty, and do as they were accustomed.

It was the task of Agnes to recall them to prudence and resignation; and a melancholy task it was, especially for one who, like her, had almost within her grasp the means of making their existence so much more endurable. She read in their countenances the belief of her power to assist them. She began to reproach herself for not having used sufficient exertions, and resolved to apply once more to Sackville. She had already been assured

by him, that to apply any part of her fortune to the payment of her father's debts, would be a violation of the wishes of her deceased aunt. But it did not, she thought, necessarily follow from thence that she was forbidden to administer to her parent's comfort; and she trusted that something out of the accumulating surplus income, over and above her yearly allowance, might be granted her for that purpose. In strict justice, to pay the debts would be a more honourable employment of the money, than to devote it to the pleasures of him who had contracted them; but it was not likely that Agnes, full of the griefs of her parents, should take this severe view of the case.

It was about a week before the dinner at the Bagshawes, that Agnes first made her application to Sackville. He heard her with an air of sincere interest, and professed to enter warmly into her feelings. He said that what she required was not impossible, but that there were difficulties which stood in the way of it. Such a measure required the concurrence of both the trustees; and however willing he himself might be to assist her, there was no prospect of Mr. Hawksworth agreeing to any thing of the kind. "But," said Sackville, "there are other means of obtaining what you require."

Agnes eagerly intreated him to adopt them.

"Most willingly," replied he, with a smile, "I shall want only your consent."

He paused for a moment, looked earnestly at her anxious countenance, approached nearer to her, and proceeded. "Your aunt, whose memory, I am sure, will ever be dear to both of us, provided in her will that the whole income of the fortune she left you, should pass into your hands, not simply on your arriving at the age of twenty-four, but even previously, in case of the occurrence of an

event, which I think I hardly need recal to your mind. It is your marriage, my dear Agnes, which will give you the fullest power of relieving the distresses of your parents. Then you will be at liberty to contribute more fully to their happiness; and I need not speak of the happiness which you will confer upon your fortunate husband, who, I am sure, will have a sincere pleasure in joining his humble endeavours to restore your father and Lady Louisa to the station which is their right.

"There is only one person, to whom I cannot venture to say that this expedient would be acceptable or advantageous, and that is yourself. To the others I will not scruple to say, that your immediate marriage would be an inestimable benefit."

Agnes heard him with an agitation that was visible, chiefly, in her increasing paleness. Her eyes were fixed on the ground, and the expression of her countenance was melancholy and anxious.

"Mr. Sackville," said she, "I engaged last September to accept you, within the space of a year, and I received from you an assurance that no attempt should be made to hasten the period of our union, at least before the end of the next June. I had hoped that, on a point of such delicacy, this promise would have been strictly observed. I need not any longer ask you whether it has or not."

Sackville was startled by the unexpected tone of reproach in which her observation was conveyed. "Excuse me;" said he, "if I *were* asked, I should say that I had not broken the promise you mention. You appealed to me, as your trustee, upon a matter of business. You asked how you can most easily obtain the power of assisting your parents. I answer, by marrying. It is the simple truth, and I could in no respect, have answered otherwise, even if I were not the person who is destined to become your husband."

"I am not disposed to deny the truth of what you say, Mr. Sackville," replied Agnes, coldly; "and I might be more obliged to you for the information, if it had been required. I knew the effect which my marriage would have upon the disposal of my fortune. I believed you to be perfectly conscious of my knowing it: and when you spoke of *other means*, I thought you were alluding to something *else*, of which I might possibly be ignorant. I asked you about the practicableness of a particular measure, and I have been answered by a description of the inflexible disposition of Mr. Hawksworth. If my request is neither impossible or improper, I will not think so ill of Mr. Hawksworth as to suppose that he cannot be induced to consent to it. At all events, the attempt shall be made. I may fail, and I shall then know how to think of other resources; but till then, I will not allow myself to be driven by a prospect of difficulties to take any other step."

Sackville felt rather embarrassed by the firmness with which she spoke, and her apparent perception of his real designs; but he was too crafty and collected to allow his discomfiture to be apparent.

"I will be guided," said he, mildly, "by your wishes: but why this displeasure? Suppose me even to have done the very worst you tax me with, to have urgently and directly pressed our immediate marriage, without any other plea than my own wishes, would this—*should* this—have been unpardonable? Should it even have been seriously considered an offence? It would be hard to accuse me of so much as a want of delicate attention; but never could it be said that I showed myself deficient in genuine attachment. It is one of the common errors of affection, my dear Agnes, to be inattentive to forms. It is true, I try to avoid this error. I know your disposition to

shrink from profession, and, in obedience to this, I endeavour to lose the lover in the friend, and to act as if I were never destined to be bound to you by any dearer ties than those by which I have been devoted to your service, through the will of your excellent aunt. But you must not suppose that, because I betray little, I necessarily feel little; and you will I hope excuse me, if the wish of my heart does sometimes escape, when any thing arises that is likely to promote it."

He regarded her with a look, which was meant to be that of love and admiration, but from which she shrunk with diffidence and dread. "Won't you say, that you forgive me, Agnes?" added he, taking her cold but unresisting hand. "A look, a smile—only a smile—and I shall be satisfied."

She did look up, and faintly smiled; but it was a smile, beneath which the countenance of Sackville fell in momentary confusion, and he shrunk from the silent language of her eye, for it convey- to him the intelligence that she was not deceived, and had no faith in his professions of affection.

But his presence of mind and pliant powers of dissimulation soon enabled him to rally, and he was boldly proceeding in the same strain, with the hope of convincing her by his perseverance, when Agnes at length stopped him.

"I began," said she, "by talking to you on a subject of business. Let us return to it. It seems that the only obstacle to my request is the difficulty of obtaining Mr. Hawksworth's consent. I am glad to hear that this is all. I shall spare no pains to obtain it, and I trust I shall succeed. I will write to him immediately, and as you do not seem to object to the reasonableness of my request I hope it will be also supported by whatever you can urge in its favour."

Sackville promised his assistance, and pretended much eagerness to forward her project. It became his object to lull the suspicions of Agnes respecting his sincerity; and so dexterously did he pursue it, that, in spite of the unfavourableness of her impression, he eventually induced her to think that she had previously misconstrued his meaning, and been disposed to judge him too severely.

CHAPTER XX.

Deceit cannot otherwise be maintained than by deceit.
SIR PHILIP SIDNEY.

IT was far from the intention of Sackville, that Agnes should succeed in her application to Mr. Hawksworth. Viewing her fortune, as that which was to become virtually his own, he was naturally averse to any expenditure which should check its present accumulation. He also dreaded the precedent which might be afforded by compliance, and the habit which Agnes might acquire of proffering assistance; and no less did he fear, that Mr. Morton might learn to look for it from that source, and, with such a prospect of support, relapse into his former habits of extravagance.

He had also fears respecting his engagement with Agnes. He knew that she was not attached to him, and had been driven into that engagement by the entreaties of her father, in order to save him from an exposure, which, after all, had not been averted. The only way in which her marriage could now be advantageous to her father, was by giving her an earlier power of assisting him; and this prospect, and the promise, were the only ties by which Sackville held her. The engagement of marriage was such as any disagreement might cause her to break. If, therefore, a present power of extending relief to her parents were to be given to Agnes, it was by no means impossible that pleas

might be found for the postponement of her marriage with him till the arrival of a fit period for asserting her independence.

Such were the results which Sackville apprehended from a compliance with the present request of Agnes; and attributing to her, like most artful people,, the same manœuvering disposition which he felt himself, he half suspected her of having in view, not so much the relief of her father, as her own eventual release from her engagement. He, therefore, resolved to frustrate her application at all hazards.

The character of Sackville's colleague was very favourable to the success of his plans. Mr. Hawksworth was a very honorable man, but weak and confiding, to a degree that rendered him an easy mark for imposition. He was timid and nervous, and fearful of acting in cases of emergency; and Sackville, when he wished to have entirely his own way, could paralyze his operations at pleasure, by a skilful display of the difficulties of a case. An awful feeling of responsibility weighed like lead upon his conscientious mind; and he was so beset with scruples, that he scarcely dared to do even what he believed to be right. He had a great respect for the abilities of Sackville, and was led, by his own goodness of heart, to think that the probity of his colleague was equal to his talents.

Sackville had acccurately noted all the qualifications of Mr. Hawksworth for a safe and passive coadjutor, and had himself dictated his selection to Mrs. Denham. Availing himself too of the retired habits of Mr. Hawksworth, he had prevented Agnes and her family from having much acquaintance with him, and he consequently found it not difficult to attribute to him any sentiments he pleased. While rendering him a mere puppet,

entirely subservient to his will, he uniformly represented him to the Mortons as peculiarly intractable. The few traits of his character, which were allowed to appear, were ingeniously wrested for this purpose. His timid scrupulosity was construed into obstinacy, and a few antiquated notions were magnified into insurmountable prejudices. Thus it became easy for Sackville to plead the opposition of Mr. Hawksworth, as a cause of the rejection of any measure that he was himself unwilling to adopt.

Sackville entered with apparent zeal into Agnes's project of writing to Mr. Hawksworth, and he promised to support her application by a letter from himself, which letter she was to see. He brought it to her, and after she had read it, and expressed her approbation of its contents, it was sealed and directed in her presence. He then took charge of that, and of her letter, promising to send them at the same time. This promise was never performed. Both letters were suppressed; and, in the place of that which he had shown to Agnes, he sent, on that same, day, the following:

"My dear Sir,

"During the two last days, I have had a good deal of conversation with our young charge, on the subject of her father's situation, and I am sorry to find, that she still entertains the same unfortunate wish, of which I before informed you relative to the application of money to his relief, out of the interest of her own fortune. There is, however, this difference in her present intentions that whereas they formerly extended to the wild idea of paying off Mr. Morton's debts, they are now confined to the more feasible plan of rendering his present situation rather more comfortable.

"I need not tell you that, in point of strict justice, her present intentions are much less defensible than her former ones. Undoubtedly not one farthing ought to be expended on superfluities, as long as any just debts remain unpaid. Agnes very naturally prefers the gratification of her parents, to satisfying the demands of their creditors; and when one considers her tender and pliant disposition, and the influence which her father has over her, one surely cannot wonder at it.

"But it is our duty, my dear Sir, unpleasant as it may be, to prevent her from sacrificing herself to an overstrained sense of filial devotion. We must not allow her to be preyed upon by the necessities of others, however nearly connected, and however anxious she may seem to assist them.

"As for the situation of Mr. Morton, if I must speak plainly on so delicate a subject, I cannot, I confess, see any sufficient call for additional expenditure. He cannot live splendidly, or receive much company, or indulge his natural taste for show; but he has every thing that is necessary for mere comfort, and this is all that, under present circumstances, he *ought* to require. If he seeks for more than this, and wishes to emerge from his retirement, and indulge in the pleasures of society, which I suspect to be the case, nothing less than a very considerable addition to his present allowance will be in any degree sufficient.

"Nor would the evil end here. One expense would lead to another. Demands upon us would increase and I fear nothing short of the whole of our young ward's income would eventually satisfy them. With such demands we could not comply, and an altercation and quarrel would be the most probable consequence. I have always observed that when successive applications are to be expected, it is the safest to resist them *in limine*. After

the admission of a principle, it is very difficult to settle the question of degree, without giving offence. I need hardly remind you of the irritability of Mr. Morton's disposition, and the likelihood of offence being taken, and very seriously too.

"I rather think you will receive a letter soon from Miss Morton, upon the subject mentioned above. Should such be the case, and you think proper to write in return, it will be an accommodation to the Mortons if the letter is sent under cover to me. But perhaps you will allow me to suggest, that it would be better to take no immediate notice of the application. It is sometimes dangerous to communicate, on subjects like these, otherwise than personally. Letters are liable to be misinterpreted. Should you, however, prefer writing, the safer way (if you do not object to it) is to authorize, me by a letter, which, in case of emergency, I could show, to explain your sentiments to them. I have so long had the pleasure of acting with you, that I think there is no danger of any misconception arising between ourselves.

"In your last letter, you gave me hopes of seeing you soon in town. For my own sake I am selfish enough to wish it may be so—for yours, I ought to wish that it may not. London, which is always hateful to every one who knows the pleasures of the country, is now peculiarly disagreeable, just at the commencement of its summer turmoil. If the business on which you are coming does not absolutely require your own presence, and I can be of any use, pray tell me. I am afraid this unpleasant affair of the Mortons will tend to render your stay less agreeable. I fear you will be exposed to much solicitation, and the risk of a quarrel; but I will do all in my power to spare you as much as possible. I have not yet informed the Mortons of your intentions; and I think it will be

much pleasanter for you, if they have no previous knowledge of your arrival, that they may not be prepared for the attack. I shall, therefore, say nothing about it, and you of course will not write to them.

"With best wishes for your continuance in health, believe me, my dear Sir, ever most faithfully yours,

"EDWARD SACKVILLE.

"P. S. May I beg of you, to burn this letter? I am sure I may trust to your not committing me with the Mortons, by making any allusion to it when you meet them in town."

We have seen that the letter written by Agnes was suppressed. She waited long for that answer which was never to arrive, and at length determined to write again. To this course she was insidiously urged by Sackville; and as he affected to enter zealously into her wishes, he was allowed to see what her letter contained. He did not endeavour to suppress it, but he wrote to Mr. Hawksworth by the same post, availing himself of his knowledge of what Agnes had stated, for the purpose of weakening its impression, and he requested that no immediate notice might be taken of it.

In addition to other motives, Sackville had some hope that, by tormenting Agnes with these difficulties and delays, he might at length induce her to forsake her project. But he did not calculate sufficiently upon her firmness of purpose; and was unpleasantly surprised, about a week after she had sent the second letter, by hearing her propose, as a last resource, to go down to Mr. Hawksworth's place, and confer with him in person. Her plan seemed to be maturely arranged; her parents did not disapprove; her brother would accompany her,

and Lord Malvern had offered her a travelling carriage for the purpose.

Sackville's varied powers of persuasion and attack were instantly put into requisition to combat this unforeseen and dangerous resolution. At first the smile of incredulity was tried, and the tone of playful banter; but they were met in the same manner; and then, at length, he was reminded that her object was too serious to admit of a defeat from the arms of ridicule. Graver objections were then stated: the singularity of the step, the punctilious prejudices of Mr. Hawksworth, the implied reflection on him for neglect of attention to her request, and the absence of sufficient delay to warrant such an extremity.

The discussion was adjourned to the following day, and then Sackville yielded his reluctant approbation on the plan, after entreating that she would defer her journey for a few days; and it was at length arranged that, unless she previously received an answer, Agnes should quit London, with her brother, on the ensuing Monday. The distance from London to Mr. Hawksworth's place, was sufficient to occupy two days; and Sackville begged that Agnes would do him the favour to make use of his house at Trentford, as a resting place, on the first night, both in going and returning.

This offer had been accepted by her father in her behalf, even before she had heard it herself; and she did not like to make an ungracious return to Sackville's courtesy by non-compliance.

CHAPTER XXI.

Can such things be,
And overcome us, like a summer cloud,
Without our special wonder?

Macbeth.

THE appointed day arrived, and Agnes and her brother quitted London. Late in the evening, they reached Trentford, which they found had, in pursuance of the attentive directions of Sackville, been carefully prepared for their reception. They left it again on the following morning, and about the close of that day; Agnes with a beating heart, found herself approaching the venerable mansion of Mr. Hawksworth. She felt that an important moment was almost present, that, uncertain of the issue, she was about to throw herself upon the compassion of one, with whom, strong as was his influence over her, she had but little personal acquaintance, and to encounter prejudices, which, as she had been told, would seldom yield, even to the persuasive powers of Sackville. She remembered the arguments by which he had sought to oppose her resolution, and almost bewailed her rashness, in having so hastily overruled them.

The shades of evening were closing in, and as she drove up to the door of the mansion, its melancholy and deserted air filled her, she knew not why, with ominous forebodings. The shutters were all closed, though it might still be called day-

light; no living being was to be seen or heard, and they waited in long suspence, after repeated ringing and knocking, before any notice seemed to be taken of their arrival. At length the creaking and rattling of bars, bolts, and locks were heard within. The time which these preparations occupied, showed very plainly the excessive care with which the entrance had been guarded, a care which, to the mind of Agnes, seemed unpleasantly characteristic of what she considered the morose, suspicious temper of the owner.

The door, at last, was cautiously opened, and the trusty guardian of this well-barred portal, appeared in the person of an old woman. The motive for these precautions, and the tardy compliance with the summons, were explained by her answer to the first question: and Agnes heard, with surprise, that Mr. Hawksworth had set out for London on the preceding morning.

Much as Agnes had dreaded the expected interview a few moments before, she felt considerable disappointment. The object of a long journey was completely frustrated; and she had incurred some anxiety, which she might otherwise have been spared: and though the meeting might perhaps take place under pleasanter auspices in London, this was but a slight consolation. It seemed singular to her that such a mistake should have occurred, and that not even Sackville was previously informed of Mr. Hawksworth's intentions; but she had been taught to view the latter as an eccentric man, and this accounted for all that was strange and unforeseen.

Fortunately for Sackville, she entertained no suspicion of the vile artifice, which he had employed. Previous to her quitting London, Sackville had been informed, by letter, of the percise day on which Mr. Hawksworth would set out on his journey. His opposition to the plan proposed by

Agnes was then softened, and he only entreated her to await the expected answer till a stated day, naming that which he knew would exactly cause her to miss the person whom she went to see. He believed his treachery to be safe from discovery, and he was urged to it by a sense of the importance of securing a first interview with Mr. Hawksworth, and not allowing him to be exposed to the fascinating persuasions of his young ward till he had been steeled and tutored by a sufficient store of cogent reasons.

Agnes felt some reluctance in remaining that night at Mr. Hawksworth's, an uninvited guest, in the absence of the owner; but the old portress, who, as she soon informed her, bore the dignity of housekeeper of the mansion, urged her to stay. The engaging countenance and manners of Agnes won her heart at first sight; and the knowledge of her being the rich young lady to whom her master was guardian, together with the opportunity of displaying the great extent of her discretionary power, quite counterbalanced all the additional trouble which the invitation would cost her.

The mansion was old and sombre, full within of dark oak pannels, and rambling passages, and possessed the honours of a haunted room. But the nerves of Agnes were not, by that fatality which always attended the heroines of the Radcliffe school, exposed to a trial of its terrors; and her brother, though he professed that he should "like the fun," was not permitted by the considerate housekeeper to rue the consequences of his presumption. No adventure offered itself; and the next morning under the cheerful auspices of a bright April sun, they set out from Mr. Hawksworth's, and arrived again that night at Trentford.

This return was not expected so soon, and seemed to give little satisfaction to one of the servants, a man who had lived several years with Mr. Sack-

ville, and in whom he always seemed to place rather more confidence than in the others.

Agnes found here a letter from Sackville. It informed her, of his having that instant discovered that Mr. Hawksworth would not be at his own house when she arrived there; expressed the utmost grief for the unnecessary trouble she was exposed to, and trusted that his letter might still be in time to save her from performing more than half of her intended journey. This he knew would not be the case, nor did he mean that it should. He wrote solely with the intention of removing any suspicion of treachery on his part, that might possibly have arisen in the mind of Agnes. We have mentioned, that her pure and candid mind had not admitted the idea of any such extent of villainous deceit. The letter, therefore, operated no change in her impressions, but merely confirmed her unsuspiciousness.

There are states of the mind, in which we are peculiarly disposed to conjure up the most gloomy and dispirited views of our past and present situation. This was now the case with Agnes: the fatigue of three successive days of travelling, had perhaps tended, in no slight degree, to relax the usual elasticity of her spirits. But there was ample cause for gloom and despondency, even in the most plain and dispassionate view of the events which had happened, and were still likely to ensue. Bitterly did she regret what she now considered the too easy surrender of her affections to Lacy. It was true, he had almost explicitly declared his attachment; and there was something in his manner, at their last meeting, which indicated that he still felt it.

But how was this to be reconciled with his avowed engagement to Miss Hartley? That was a practical contradiction, before which the weight of his half-uttered protestations sunk into compara-

tive insignificance. She knew nothing of the circumstances which had led to that engagement; but she knew that it had been talked of before her acquaintance with Lacy began. Miss Hartley was probably the first and rightful possesser of his heart, and she herself was but reaping the punishment of an act of forgetful aggression.

Cruel, indeed, had been her lot. On her seemed to have descended the terrible denunciation of scripture; she had been "cursed even in her blessings." Her parents, from whom she should seek for comfort and protection, had been the cause of deep affliction: the innocent admission of a first attachment had been turned to poison; and her wealth had subjected her to a thraldom, of which a type may be found in the tyranny of Mezentius, who chained together the living and the dead.

"Would that my lot had been more humble!" she exclaimed, almost aloud in the solitude of her own apartment. "Oh, that I had not possessed this fatal wealth but for which, he to whom I am now plighted never would have sought me!" She wished at length to dismiss these thoughts and seek forgetfulness and repose; but in vain. The fever of her mind prevented her from sleeping, and she arose and looked out at the cold moonlight scene, which the view from the window afforded.

It was a bright, clear night. Only a few fleecy clouds floated in the sky, and from among them, the stars glimmered faintly, almost extinguished by the splendour of the moon, now high in the heavens, and near the full. Its white, cold, watery beams that were shed over the landscape, deprived every object, however plainly visible, of its daylight tint, and gave to the whole the appearance of being slightly overspread with snow. The adjoining lake, one of the chief ornaments of the place, and the expanse of sky; objects that in the day were lightest, were now enveloped in the deep-

est gloom. All the solemnity of night seemed to be concentrated in them, and the rest was unnaturally brightened.

Though the forms remained the same, so great was the difference of hue, that Agnes could scarcely recognize the scene on which she had gazed before. All was still: not even the feathery summits of the loftiest trees could be seen to move, nor did the gentlest rustle meet the ear. If solitude is ever terrible, it is chiefly when accompanied with silence; and Agnes could scarcely avoid feeling in some degree appalled by its present solemnity. She was not more accessible to feelings of superstitious dread, than the boldest of her sex may sometimes be; yet she felt, she knew not why, an ominous chill of fear, and longed for an indication, however slight that some living thing was still waking as well as herself. The scream of the owl, or even the tick of the death-watch would have been almost music to her ear at that awful moment.

She listened; and at length a sound was heard, though so indistinctly, that at first she thought herself deceived. It seemed to come from below, but she hardly knew whether from within or out of the house. Once she plainly distinguished something like the creaking of a bar, and afterwards it seemed as if the sash of a window was gently raised. Then all was still as death; then a slight rustling sound was heard, and afterwards a repetition of the former, as if the window was being closed again; and then once more all was still. A terrible thought flashed across the mind of Agnes at this moment; that robbers were entering the house, and had probably, ere this effected their purpose. She stood for a few minutes, in a state of breathless alarm, screening herself from view, behind a corner of the window, listening intently, and straining her eyes to penetrate the shadowy recesses of the shrubbery below.

She had not looked long when she thought she saw something move, but was not certain, and imagined for an instant that fear might have made her senses deceitful. But it was not so; again she saw it, but knew not what the object was. She drew still farther back, and watched with a more intent anxiety. Presently, a figure, scarcely distinguishable from the surrounding objects but by the shadow which it cast, was seen to emerge from the bushes, and move gently from the house. It was a man of rather low stature, whose stealthy, cautious tread, showed that he wished to avoid observation. He looked frequently from side to side, and once, screening himself behind an evergreen, he turned round, and seemed to reconnoitre the windows; and, as far as she could judge by the direction of his head, he was particularly observing her's. She could not distinguish his features, which appeared to be concealed by crape. In an instant, he had turned away his head, moved onwards, and in a few seconds was out of sight.

Agnes remained long pondering in astonishment and dread on this singular apparition. One thing seemed evident to her, that this person, be he who he might, had clandestinely quitted the house; but whether he were one of the household, or a thief that had gained secret entrance, was more than she could decide. The more she thought, the more she inclined to the former opinion: she believed she had heard the window closed and fastened again, and this could only have been done by some assistant within.

This was a less terrifying impression, and she was glad to adopt it. She debated with herself for a while, whether she should alarm the household immediately, or wait till the morning; and irresolution and fear so far triumphed as to induce her, perhaps erroneously, to pursue the less prompt course, and defer her communication. She was

fatigued in mind and body; and, in spite of the alarm, caused by what she had witnessed, sleep at length surprised her, and the morning came before she next awoke.

At first, her recollection of the past circumstance was by no means clear, and she almost doubted whether the whole was not a dream. But by degrees the obscurity vanished, and the scene returned so vividly to her mind, when she stood at the spot from which she had seen the figure, and traced the course it had taken; and so many concomitant facts now rose to her remembrance, that she soon dismissed every particle of doubt, and gave immediate information of all that she had witnessed.

The intelligence was received with many demonstrations of surprise and dismay, and in some with a slight appearance of incredulity. The person which Agnes had seen was strictly affirmed not to be any of the household; and, indeed, she did not think that his figure bore any resemblance, though her judgment on this point must necessarily have been imperfect. On the other hand, if it was a robber (as was remarked by the confidential servant above alluded to,) and he had entered the house, he must have taken something away, and it was their first object to ascertain if any locks had been broken open, or if any thing was missing.—A careful search was instantly commenced, which ended in their coming to the conclusion that every thing appeared to remain precisely as it was the day before.

During this search, on the part of the household, Agnes recommended to her brother to look for the traces of feet in those parts of the shrubbery, where, according to the best of her recollection, the figure had appeared, and particularly under the window, which she had heard opened and shut. He did look, and found nothing. Agnes was sur-

prised, nay, almost inclined to waver in her belief as to the reality of what she had seen. A weaker mind might have been led to think that the figure was an unearthly visitant. In fact, the absence of traces might be accounted for by the circumstances of their having been a frost in the night, though it had begun to thaw towards daybreak.

Her brother, however, who had all along been rather incredulous, now lost all faith in the correctness of her story, upon finding it so utterly unsupported by any other circumstance. He believed it to be the result of a feverish imagination, or a dream, the impression of which had been so vivid as to seem like truth; and he laboured to persuade his sister, that if she had really seen what she described, she would have immediately given the alarm, instead of going quietly to sleep, and such is the imperfection of our senses, and our want of reliance on them, that Agnes was almost disposed to subscribe to his opinion.

One slight circumstance only, which appeared upon re-examination of the room the window of which was supposed to have been opened, tended to confirm her previous impressions; it was nothing more than a drop of oil upon the floor, near one of the windows. A closer examination showed that oil had been applied to the hinges of the shutters, and various parts of this window, and it was easy to conceive that it was done with a view of lessoning the noise of opening and closing. There were two other windows in the room, neither of which bore the same appearance. The room was one which Sackville used as a sitting-room, and in which he generally transacted business. It was the room in which he showed to Allen his forgery, and the documents which confirmed it. There were in it a large library-table furnished with drawers, and a bureau, all locked, and believed to contain papers and articles of value.

Agnes was anxious to return to London, and quitted Trentford that morning without any additional circumstances having transpired which tended to throw a light upon this mysterious affair.—While changing horses at the solitary inn of a small town, about fifty miles from Trentford, a person came up to the carriage, and taking off his hat civilly inquired whether he was not speaking to Miss Morton, and informed her that his name was Allen. The information was needless, as she knew him by sight. His object in addressing her appeared to be no other than to make inquiries after Mr. Morton, who, he said, he was sorry to hear had been very unwell. Agnes assured him that the report he had received must have been exaggerated; and, after another observation or two, he again bowed and walked away.

This was the only face she knew that met her eye in her way to London; and, without any incident of the slightest moment, she again returned to the humble and melancholy dwelling of her parents.

CHAPTER XXII.

Flat burglary as ever was committed.
Much ado about Nothing.

On the following day, at an early hour, Sackville presented himself to the Mortons. To Agnes he was full of condolence and regret upon the fruitlessness of her journey, and the arrival of his own letter too late to be of use. Agnes, in return, had much to say to him, and among other things, related all that had passed at Trentford.

Sackville heard her tale, at first, merely as an amusing incident, and seemed prepared to treat it lightly; but, as she proceeded, his attention became more deeply fixed. He looked grave, and at length, changed colour, and ended with declaring that he entertained little doubt of his having been robbed. He even begged her to recapitulate all the circumstances, and in the presence of her father committed the whole to paper. His manner showed that the facts she mentioned appeared to him of the most serious import; and such was his eagerness to satisfy his doubts that he set out immediately from London, and arrived at Trentford that night.

It was very late when he reached it, but before he slept he commenced his examination. He began with his own sitting-room, out of which the person was supposed to have escaped. All that had been locked remained so still, and therefore the theft, if such there were, must have been com-

mitted by means of false keys. He knew that there was much to lose, and his hand trembled with anxiety as he turned the first lock. His anxious eye soon fell upon some money, which he remembered to have left in the drawer which he first opened: he counted it, and it was still the same: he then looked for other valuables, and he found them all untouched. He directed his attention in turn to every object that could be supposed to excite the cupidity of a robber, but all remained where he had left them; and, after a long and anxious search, he closed his eyes that night, without having been able to discover that he had suffered the slightest loss.

He arose next morning, well pleased with the result of his investigation, and only vexed at having been rendered uneasy, and led to undertake a journey by an idle tale, perhaps the fabrication of a feverish fancy, and which had been proved to end in nothing. He was, however, struck by the singular retribution which caused him to receive at the hands of Agnes the punishment of an anxious and unnecessary journey, in return for that to which he had exposed her. After all, was it a hoax? Was it done for the sake of tormenting him, or of getting him out of the way during their first interview with Mr. Hawksworth?

This was a very improbable course for Agnes to adopt; but, in conformity with the proneness of artful people to suspect others, strange and unworthy as the idea was, Sackville, for a moment, entertained it. He determined, however, before he went away to investigate a little farther, and again opened the bureau which stood in his own sitting-room. Suddenly a fearful thought flashed across his mind: he knew not why it occurred at that moment, or why it had never struck him before; but it made his countenance turn alternately red and

pale with agitation. A search was then commenced among his papers, and was continued for several minutes. Exclamations of apprehension and trouble frequently escaped him, till at length there was a dead pause, and he sat for some time motionless. It seemed as if his worst fears were realised; and, after the stupor of surprise his feelings burst forth into passionate exclamations of mingled anger and despair.

The instrument of his control over Allen, the forged paper, with its accompanying documents, could no longer be found. Every thing else appeared to remain precisely in its former place.—Nothing was even disarranged; and but for the intimation which he had received from Agnes, months, years, might have elapsed before he had become sensible of his loss. The removal of these important papers could, of course, be attributed to no other person than Allen; but it was difficult to believe that he had committed so daring a crime without the assistance of some person belonging to the house. The probability of domestic treachery tended to embitter the loss to Sackville, more especially as his suspicions fell upon the servant in whom he had hitherto reposed most confidence.

Another aggravating recollection arose to his mind. It was, that he himself was in some degree the cause of that which had happened. If he had not complied with Allen's request to be allowed to see the forged paper, that person would never have known where it might be found. How incautious had he been to restore the paper in Allen's presence to its former place, and to allow it to remain there! But he had never contemplated the probability of such a bold extent of villany.

"I was a fool," he bitterly exclaimed, "to tamper with crime, and not to be prepared for the worst that might ensue; to admit a felon to my

confidence, and trust to his forbearance. I knew that the man was crafty and unscrupulous, but I undervalued his resolution." He then remembered how on the occasion of showing the paper, he vainly flattered himself to have obtained a signal triumph over the poor trembling tool of his villanies; but now the crafty wretch had triumphed in his turn, and the able and artful Sackville seemed to shrink to a humble tyro, in cunning and audacity, compared with the mean and half-educated man whom he had once moulded to his will. He felt degraded in his own eyes by having been thus outwitted, and vowed revenge on his insidious aggressor.

But this revenge was not easily to be obtained. There were many difficulties in the way of legal redress. He was fully persuaded that the lost papers could have been taken by no other than Allen, but his presumptive evidence was not of that kind which would be satisfactory in a court of justice. No pecuniary value could be assigned to the papers, nor would it even be possible to prove that such had ever existed. Allen, if brought to trial, would probably defend himself by denying all knowledge of them, and declaring the whole to be a malicious fiction; and Sackville knew not how he should reply. He might lay open a full account of the whole of the transaction which had passed between them; but how disgraceful would that exposure be to himself! He should even be obliged to confess himself guilty of a misprision of felony, and his character would be irrevocably blasted. He should be obliged to declare upon a trial that no money or other valuable property had been touched, not even that which had been deposited in the same place with the lost papers; and this circumstance would throw over the proceedings a suspicion, which would be almost fatal to his cause.

Such were the difficulties which would present themselves even in the case of his having a reasonable probability of being able to attach the act of burglary to Allen. But this was found to be far from an easy task; and the exertions which Sackville made to trace his progress on the day preceding and following the robbery, were utterly unsuccessful. He recollected having heard from Agnes, in the course of conversation, that she saw him on the following day at a place fifty miles from Trentford, and though the "alibi" was not conclusive, it was strongly in Allen's favour. Sackville made diligent inquiries at this place respecting Allen but could gain no information, except from one person who had rather a confused recollection of a man, corresponding to the description, having come to the inn on foot.

Sackville, therefore, dismissed all hope of bringing the delinquent to justice; and his revengeful feelings were compelled to satisfy themselves with the prospect of secretly blasting the character of the man on whom he could no longer calculate as a submissive tool, and whom he could not, with safety, openly attack.

Little doubt will probably be entertained by our readers of the guilt of Allen; but they may, nevertheless, think it more satisfactory to be presented with an explicit statement of the truth. The person whom Agnes saw was Allen. Ever since his discovery of the situation in which the forged paper was kept, he had resolutely determined to destroy it. The atrocious project of burning down the whole house once occurred to his guilty mind; but it was abandoned for the safer plan which he afterwards carried into execution. His first step was to obtain, by means of a considerable bribe the assistance of that servant, to whom we have before alluded, as one in whom Sackville reposed

peculiar confidence. This man, as the event showed, was utterly unworthy of that confidence: but it is the common fate of rich and powerful villainy to fall a victim to the humble instruments by whose aid it seeks to advance itself.

From this servant Allen obtained impressions in wax of Sackville's keys, and procured false keys to be made. Next, it was necessary that Allen should be clandestinely admitted, this servant being the only person intrusted with the secret.—The time had been settled without any expectation of Agnes and her brother being then at Trentford, and after their unforeseen return there was no opportunity for further concert. At midnight Allen was introduced into the house, unlocked the bureau, and after a long and careful search, found, and carried off, his own forgery and the attesting documents.

Every precaution had been taken to ensure his silent and secret escape. The situation of the room occupied by Agnes was, however, unfavourable, and in fixing his eyes upon the window, he faintly perceived her figure receding from it, as if she had observed him. This caused in him no slight alarm, for he foresaw all the consequences to which her observation might lead, and even dreaded an immediate pursuit. But fertile in resources, he resolved to turn this apparent danger into an advantage, and knowing the direction in which she would travel, he rode all night till he had reached a considerable distance from Trentford, and leaving his horse a few miles from the place where he afterwards accosted her, walked thither, and awaited her coming.

Thus providing for the worst that could ensue, an eventual trial, he should be able to convert the principal witness against him into the most effectual means of his defence.

CHAPTER XXIII.

A wise man endeavours, by considering all circumstances, to make conjectures and form conclusions: but the smallest accident intervening (and in the course of affairs it is impossible to foresee all) does often produce such turns and changes, that at last he is just as much in doubt of events as the most ignorant and inexperienced person.

SWIFT.

SACKVILLE, on his way back to London, anxiously reflected on the policy which it was advisable to adopt in speaking to the Mortons of his loss; and as he could not describe the nature of it, he thought it was better to treat it lightly. He, therefore, told them that the only things missing were a few papers, which he himself had probably mislaid, but that nothing was gone that any thief was likely to take. He seemed perfectly unruffled, and smiled when he spoke of the supposed robber, as if he doubted whether the senses of Agnes had not deceived her, though politeness withheld him from plainly expressing that opinion.

Much as he longed to take his meditated revenge, by secret accusations of Allen, he felt that prudence dictated forbearance; and that it was necessary to disentangle himself from all connection with the instrument of his villainies, or place himself beyond the reach of his retaliation, before he attempted to crush him.

Independent of the serious discovery which Sackville had made at Trentford, he found much cause to regret his absence from London. Three days

had materially altered the aspect of affairs between the Mortons and Mr. Hawksworth, and brought them to a state of mutual good understanding, very detrimental to the views of Sackville, and which, had he been in town, he would have laboured to prevent. As Sackville's evil stars would have it, Mr. Morton, wishing, very naturally, to show all possible attention to the guardian of his daughter, had called upon Mr. Hawksworth, and invited him to dine with them that same day. The entertainment to be sure was such as Mr. Morton would once have shuddered at the bare thought of either giving or receiving; but Mr. Hawksworth, as his invitor expected, was not fastidious upon these points.

The result of that evening was, the removal of many erroneous impressions from the minds of each party. Mr Hawksworth found, in Mr. Morton, a very gentlemanly man, of mild and engaging manners; and he was delighted with Agnes, and perfectly well pleased with the languid good humour of Lady Louisa.

The Mortons, on their part, found Mr. Hawksworth by no means the strange, bigotted, intractable person which he had been represented to them. He seemed a shy, quiet, good-natured, elderly man, full of old-fashioned ceremonious politeness, and rather slow in his ideas, and elaborate in his phraseology; naturally nervous, strongly impressed, through the timidity of his character, with a fear of committing himself, or of giving offence, but, at the same time, candid and benevolent.

Mr. Hawksworth did not find himself assailed by those solicitations which Sackville had caused him to dread. The ill-timed journey undertaken by Agnes, was necessarily mentioned; but during the whole of the first day, no allusion was made to the object of it, and it was not till he himself called

upon the Mortons the following morning, that Agnes, who requested a short and private conference, then introduced her application. To the surprise of Agnes, she then found that Mr. Hawksworth was by no means so rigid and inflexible in his notions as she was prepared to expect. He did not seem very unfavourable to her request, nor had much to urge in opposition to it. He seemed only timid in the execution of his office; talked much of his responsibility, and the necessity of mature consideration, long pompous words, which he often repeated; and was evidently afraid of doing any thing without the entire concurrence of Sackville. Nevertheless, urged by a sincere desire to gratify, as far as was consistent with his duty, the wishes of Agnes, he at length declared, that if not opposed by the opinion of his colleague, he should be happy, for his own part, to accede to her request.

He was not a little surprised to learn, that Sackville had delivered precisely the same sentiments; and he could hardly reconcile the circumstance with a perfect fairness of proceeding. However, this assurance, coming as it did from the lips of Agnes, quite disarmed Mr. Hawksworth of all his intended severity of opposition; and Sackville, on his arrival, found, to his dismay, that the negotiation was in such a train that there remained but little hope of frustrating its fulfilment. He came to this conclusion, after two separate conversations with Agnes and with Mr. Hawksworth, in which he was obliged to exercise his ingenuity in qualifying and unsaying a good deal that he had said before.

Having once resolved to permit the request of Agnes to be granted he took care to appropriate the greatest share of credit to himself, and to appear to lead rather than to follow; and he entered with such apparent zeal into the furtherance of her

wishes and seemed so sincerely happy in the prospect of their fulfilment, that Agnes felt, for a moment, as if she could almost learn to love him.

"And now that we have gained our point," said he, to Agnes, with his most engaging smile, "there is a project which I mean to propose to your father and Lady Louisa, and which I think will be for their benefit, and comfort, and which I hope they will approve of. No, no," he added, seeing her blush, and look alarmed, "it is not the object which I have most at heart; it is calculated for their good rather than for ours—or *mine*, I believe I ought to say."

This project was that the Mortons should make use of the money to be advanced to them out of the accumulated interest of their daughter's fortune for the last three years, for the purpose of enabling them to go abroad. Sackville urged this measure with all the force of his persuasive eloquence; and he painted so well its numerous advantages and pleasures, the benefit to be expected to their health and spirits, and the easy rate at which comparative luxuries might be obtained in foreign countries, that it was soon unanimously voted; and it was finally decided, that it should be carried into execution, if possible, in the course of a month. Sackville would fain have induced them to name an earlier time; but Lady Louisa had an insuperable objection to crossing the sea before the spring gales had quite subsided, and could not have made up her mind to so serious a step with less time for preparation.

We have seen that the plans of Sackville have undergone a sudden change, and it will be necessary to detail the motives by which he was actuated. One of them was his jealousy of Lacy, and his consequent wish to remove Agnes from the possibility of meeting him. He feared, with rea-

son, that her attachment for him was not quite extinct, and was made uneasy even by the slight circumstance of her having dined in his company at the Bagshawes. He also felt that he had lost his former hold upon Allen, and could not stifle an indistinct apprehension, that some of his nefarious transactions with that person might, by some means or other, come to the knowledge of the Mortons. But if he could once carry the Mortons abroad, this danger would almost cease.

Such were some of the considerations which led to his sudden proposal of a removal to the Continent.

CHAPTER XXIV.

> Their great guilt,
> Like poison given to work a great time after,
> Now 'gins to bite the spirits.
>
> *Tempest.*

It was not without reason that Sackville reflected with dismay on the cessation of his former means of influence over Allen. It could not be doubted that a person who had adopted such vigorous measures to effect his independence, would avail himself of it to the utmost; and even if Sackville could have any hopes of employing his offices for the future, it must be by dint of bribery, rather than of compulsion. Besides, he knew that the tables were turned, and that instead of Allen being in his power, he himself was now in Allen's. He knew that the latter had in his possession, letters and papers relative to some of their late infamous transactions; and it was not impossible that cupidity or revenge might lead him at some time or other, to make an unfriendly use of them. It was, therefore, of the first importance to Sackville, to get them out of Allen's hands.

It was known to Sackville that Allen was to come up to town shortly, for the purpose of being examined before a committee upon a projected railway. He accordingly wrote to him, employing the most gracious and friendly terms, wishing suc-

cess to the business in behalf of which he was engaged, proffered his own good offices, and then concluded a letter of more specious profession than he generally thought necessary to use towards his inferiors, by requesting that Allen would bring to London, and deliver to him, certain letters and papers, which he then specified. In a few days, he received an answer from Allen, stating, that if the above-mentioned letters and papers could be found, they should be brought.

Allen at length arrived in London, and Sackville sent to him to request a conference. He obeyed the summons, and the confederates once more met. There was no change in Allen's manner. It was civil and submissive as before. Sackville also tried to behave the same as usual; but, in spite of himself, an inward sense of insecurity induced him to soften his former tone of command, and blend with it more of courtesy and persuasion.

"Well, my good friend," said he to Allen, after talking for a while on subjects of minor importance, "I know you are a man of your word, and therefore, I need hardly ask whether you have brought those letters which I wrote to you about."

"I have, Sir," replied Allen, drily.

"Quite right—many thanks to you; and you have got them here?" pursued Sackville, endeavouring to repress all appearance of the eagerness which he really felt.

"No, Sir," returned the other, in the same quiet tone. "I have not brought them with me now."

"Indeed! well—it does not much signify. You can bring them to me to-morrow."

Allen returned no immediate answer, but cast

his eyes on the ground, with an air of mystery and reluctance.

"Where is the difficulty?" said Sackville, with impatience.

"Difficulty?—Oh, none, I hope, Sir; I dare say we shall soon come to a proper arrangement;" then, after another pause, he added drily, "A man, Sir, must live."

"Is that a new discovery of yours?" replied Sackville, with a laugh. "The observation is true enough; but I don't exactly see the drift of it. Pray what does it mean?"

"It means just this, Sir; that I have exposed myself to a good deal of risk and inconvenience on your account, in all these affairs, not to mention the trouble, which was no trifle; and I hope, Sir, that if I am to give you up the letters and papers that you wrote about, you will not object, in return, to make me a handsome consideration."

"What do you call a handsome consideration?"

"Oh, Sir," replied Allen: with affected moderation, "I don't presume to dictate to you: I leave it to your generosity."

"My generosity declines answering. I must insist upon your telling me what you expect."

Allen hesitated, and turned away for a moment, as if in the act of calculating. "I am sorry, Sir," said he, after a short period of silence, "that you will force me to name the terms myself, for I don't like to seem encroaching and exorbitant; but, if I must speak, I will tell you at once, honestly and plainly, that I think, the least I ought to take, is five thousand pounds."

Sackville received this announcement with a mingled expression of astonishment and rage, and his

colour rose as he indignantly surveyed the associate of his villainies.

"Excellent!" he replied: "this almost exceeds belief. And do you pretend to say, that unless I comply with this modest request, you shall withhold the papers I asked for?"

"I certainly shall," replied Allen firmly.

"Very well," pursued the other, "then I shall know what course to take. Hark you, Sir, when I asked you to name your demand, it was without the slightest intention of complying with it, even had the sum been trifling compared with that which you have mentioned. You have no right to make any stipulation; and I shall steadily resist such an aggression."

"I am sorry for it, for the sake of both of us," replied Allen, coolly.

There was a threat implied in this speech, which stung Sackville to the quick; and his rage at being thus rebelled against by the hitherto submissive instrument of his will, was almost too great for concealment. But prudence warned him that he had a difficult part to play, and he paused for reflection, before he ventured to reply.

"Allen," he answered, fixing upon him a penetrating glance of scrutiny, "this language is new. You seem to have forgotten, all at once, the tremendous punishment which hangs over you, and which my hand can let fall. You now talk as if you were at liberty to stipulate, upon more than equal terms, and as if my power had ceased; and I ask you, Sir, the reason of this change;" and Sackville, as he uttered this ensnaring question, again fixed his eyes upon Allen, as if he would read his very thoughts.

Allen bore this terrible scrutiny with a compo-

sure that surprised his querist. He was perfectly unabashed, and seemed even indifferent. He was amply endowed with that presence of mind, and command of countenance, which serve to constitute what may be called civil courage. Perhaps he would not, with such firmness, have met the eye of an honest man; but his knowledge of Sackville's character blunted the efficacy of the attack. It was but the encounter of artifice with artifice, of guilt with guilt. It was a mere trial of boldness and address, in which the secret stings of an evil conscience had no power to operate.

"Mr. Sackville," said Allen, calmly, "I have no objection to tell you my reasons, for I wish to be open in my dealing with *you*. I know, Sir, that you have in your possession evidence against me, which, if you chose to make use of it, might ruin me for ever. But, Sir, I have been considering the subject, and I don't think that you will ever choose to make use of it in that way. I am a plain, simple man, Sir, and no lawyer; but I know that there is such an offence as misprision of felony; and I know, that in case of a trial, even though you did bring me to justice, it could not be very easy for you to clear yourself of that offence in the opinion of the public; and I think, Sir, that it would be in my power, to let out such a history of all our transactions, as would go near to make you fly the country. I don't say that you would suffer any thing from the law; but you would certainly lose your character; and a character is of too much consequence to a gentleman in your situation, for you to run the risk of injuring it, merely for the sake of punishing a poor man like me, even though I had offended you ever so much. On this account, Sir, I don't think that you will ever bring me to trial for the forgery, and I have

determined to brave the consequences of resisting your orders.

There was something in the dogged business-like calmness of this defiance, which made it as formidable as it was annoying. At the same time, there was a studied ingenuity in the assignment of the motives of Allen's present conduct, which brought fresh evidence to Sackville's mind, that Allen was guilty of the removal of the forged paper. How to reply to him was a difficult question. Fraud and flattery would be equally unavailing, and would tend to raise the demands of his antagonist, by a tacit confession of weakness. To persuade, was hopeless; it was better if possible to bully. Allen was probably ignorant of the extent of Sackville's information, and a sudden announcement of it, might perhaps awe him into submission.

"Allen," said the latter, "your reasons do credit to your ingenuity; but they are not the real ones. I know them and will tell them"—then after a pause, calculated to give effect to his words, he added in a tone of impressive solemnity, "I accuse you of having, on the morning of the sixteenth, a little after midnight, burglariously entered my house at Trentford, and stolen from thence the forged paper, which I had in my possession. This I know, and from evidence of the strongest kind. That evidence I shall not detail; but you may have reason to rue its accuracy, if you persist in your present opposition to my wishes."

Allen received this terrible accusation with an air of evident confusion; but it was the confusion of astonishment, rather than of guilt, and was scarcely more than might have been evinced, under such circumstances, by an innocent person. When he first spoke, it was to request, with an

admirable look of bewilderment, that Mr. Sackville would do him the favour to repeat what he had just said.

"I cannot understand you, Sir," said he, when he had heard it a second time, "I cannot for the life of me. It is no joking matter, and yet I can hardly think you in earnest. I ask you, Sir, do you seriously believe me to have stolen the paper?"

"I do," replied Sackville, sternly.

"Very well—then I am to understand that the paper is missing?"

Sackville was silent.

"Silence gives consent," resumed the other, with a coarse smile. "This is good news for me—I am free—and now, Sir, we no longer stand upon the same terms as formerly."

"Perhaps not," resumed Sackville, "but they are little changed for your advantage. Your character is still in my power, and probably your life."

"My life is as safe as yours, Sir; and as for my character—you say it is in your power—yes, and your character is in mine: but upon that point the sooner we come to an understanding the better. To say that you can ruin my character is all very fine between ourselves; but I would not advise you to try. If you are wise, you will not accuse me of this cock-and-bull robbery of the paper you have lost—no; nor of the old business of the forgery. Say nothing you cannot support, or you shall find what it is to meddle with people's reputations. I know that the law can give me redress, and the law shall—and if you were to speak against me, I would bring my action for defamation, as soon as look at you. As for your trial, and your proofs, and your evidence of a robbery that never existed, I laugh at them, Sir; I laugh at them.

It is easy enough to spread slander, but it is not so easy, in a court of justice, to substantiate a lie. Besides, supposing, for argument's sake, that I had actually committed the robbery you talk of, I should like to know, Sir, how you would indict me? What is the value of the forged paper? How would you describe it? How will you account for your possession of such a paper? and who will you bring to swear that it ever existed? And supposing (which is very improbable) that you could succeed in convicting me, how would your character bear my true account of all the transactions that have passed between us! No, Sir, silence would be your safest course, even if I *had* stolen the paper, and would confess it here before a witness. And now, as for the forgery, Sir, of which I do confess myself guilty; as you seem to have lost the only proof, let me advise you never to mention it. I cannot suffer attacks upon my character. It stands very clear with the world at large, and I am determined to keep it so. Therefore, Sir, take notice—if I ever find, that you have even so much as hinted what you know of that affair, I shall think it a duty—a duty which I owe to myself, and my family, to defend myself by bringing an action against you. You need not look so angry, Sir. I speak for your sake as much as for my own; for if you should be so imprudent as to talk, I dare say the law will allow me to redress myself, pretty handsomely, at your expense."

"Admirable!" exclaimed Sackville, goaded beyond the bounds of forbearance. "And have you the effrontery to say this to *me?*—me, who have seen you so long in your true colours, and know what a poor, mean, shuffling scoundrel you are? and to threaten *me* with the consequences of speaking the *truth!* I thought I had known you; but

this pitch of impudence exceeds all I could have believed."

"Now, Sir, you talk like a gentleman," said Allen, with the most insulting composure. "I could stand for an hour and listen to you. I am not in any hurry, Sir; you may go on abusing me."

There was something in the calm derision of Allen's words and manner, more insupportably galling to Sackville, than the utmost vehemence of invective could have been. Though endued with strong powers of self command, he could not control the expression of his rage.

"Leave the house," said he, "infernal villain!" and scarcely could he restrain his hands from an act of violence.

But nothing could ruffle the composure of Allen. "We are alone, Sir," said he with a sneer, as he coolly smoothed the brim of his hat, "and calling names is mere child's play; but when you speak to me next, Mr. Sackville, say something actionable before witnesses, and I shall be obliged to you. Good day, Sir;" and once more surveying Sackville from head to foot, with a smile of defiance, he turned round, and left the room.

Never yet had Sackville experienced feelings so bitter as those which this interview had excited. He had been thwarted, defied, insulted, by the man whose words and actions were lately subservient to his will, and who could scarcely be said to live but by his permission. He had been proved inferior in address, in confidence, and in temper, to one who was greatly below him in station, and in all those mental acquirements, of which Sackville had most reason to be proud. But he had stooped from his height to be this man's associate in guilt. and he felt, too late, that guilt had levelled all dis-

tinctions. He felt too that all those endowments which would have aided his advancement in a worthier career, now redounded to his disadvantage. They were but clogs that impeded his descent into those miry paths, of villainy which he had demeaned himself to tread.

Bad as he was, he had still some gentlemanly scruples, some faint feeling of honour, which tended only to weaken him in the conflict with one who had none; and he found at length, that he was contending with a wretch, who like the unjust steward in the parable, was "wiser in his generation."

These thoughts occurred to Sackville, and raging, in his bosom, formed "the proper hell" of baffled wickedness.

When his anger cooled, he had also to accuse himself of folly, in having allowed Allen to depart, without having again endeavoured to treat for the delivery of the letters. His plan of terrifying him into submission had evidently failed, and it was, therefore, necessary to have recourse to gentler methods. It, however, appeared to Sackville, upon more mature consideration, that such methods could be tried with a greater prospect of success in the course of another interview, and that in the mean while his threats might have had more effect than Allen was willing to admit.

In this conjecture, Sackville was right. Allen was not so regardless of Sackville's threats to bring him to trial for the burglary at Trentford, as he affected to be. He did not know that Sackville might not be in possession of powerful evidence, or even that a confession might not have been extorted from his accomplice; but he knew that, at all events, there was nothing to be gained, and much to be hazarded—by immediate submission or even by an appearance of irresolution and fear.

The soundest policy urged him to assume the attitude of innocence and security. This, if Sackville's threats were destitute of foundation, would enable him to persevere in his exorbitant demands; if not, and danger was really to be feared, it would be equally easy to conciliate Sackville at a more advanced stage of the business.

CHAPTER XXV.

> Which is the villain?—let me see his eyes,
> Than when I note another man like him,
> I may avoid him.
>
> *Much ado about Nothing.*

After watching the struggles and broodings of guilt, we will now turn to the more agreeable contemplation, of the steps pursued by Lacy for vindicating his injured honour. He had now learned that Mr. Morton suspected him of having behaved with the basest treachery—of having, at the time of his frank and friendly declaration on the hustings, secretly participated in a plot, which was to secure him the election, by plunging his opponent into ruin and disgrace. He did Mr. Morton the justice to believe, that these injurious suspicions had not been gratuitously assumed. He believed them to have been suggested by others; and it was now his task to unravel the tissue of misrepresentations by which those suggestions had been conveyed. He preferred, for the prudential reasons which we have mentioned above, to effect his justification without communicating with Mr. Morton, but to prove the absence of all collusion from the confessions of those by whom the legal process had been conducted.

In this investigation he was favoured by acci-

dent. He had been applied to, by a person of the name of Wilkinson, for his recommendation and assistance in procuring an office then vacant in the county. The applicant hinted in his letter, which was worded rather obscurely, that this request, if granted, would not be the first obligation he had received; but hoped, that he should not be considered altogether an undeserving object. To this Lacy replied by professing his ignorance of any other favour that he had conferred, or cause that existed for it—declining to recommend without a knowledge of the qualification of the parties, and declaring that, *cæteris paribus*, he must support the application of another person.

It was soon after the despatch of this answer, that Lacy left London for Wichcombe. One of his objects, when in that neighbourhood, was to see the attorney employed against Mr. Morton, and the creditor who sued him for debt, and to discover if they had any knowledge of the existence of such an injurious opinion as Mr. Morton seemed to entertain. A short inquiry soon informed him that the creditor of Mr. Morton, and the man of the name of Wilkinson, who had lately written to him, were one and the same person. Wilkinson lived at no great distance from Wichcombe, and no sooner had he heard of Lacy's arrival in that town, than he came over to see him, full of indignation at the unfavourable manner in which his application had been met.

"I am not a Wichcombe voter, Sir," said the man; "but I think I deserve some encouragement, for all that; for I can make bold to say that I have done you a good turn, and at the last election too."

"Explain yourself," said Lacy.

"Oh, there is no need of that: you know well

enough, Sir, that I was the person who sent the bailiffs to Dodswell, and made Mr. Morton give up the contest."

"I know it *now*," said Lacy.

The man smiled at the implied denial of having known it before.

"Even if that circumstance had gained me the election," pursued Lacy, "which it did not, for I was at the head of the poll before it occurred, I should be very sorry that it should be considered any reason for my favouring or assisting you."

"Oh, certainly, Sir,—" replied the man, with an odd look of intelligence, "it need not be *considered* so; but you know it *is* a reason between ourselves."

"No," said Lacy, rather indignantly, "I deny that, with me, it either is or will be so."

Wilkinson again smiled, and was silent. Lacy was struck with his manner, and determined not to neglect so fair an opportunity of pursuing his intended inquiry. "You seem," said he, to Wilkinson, "not to believe me. You seem to think, I know not why, that a secret understanding exists between us; your letter conveyed that impression, and your words and manner express the same; this is to me a mystery, and I wish to break through it: speak out, plainly and boldly, and let us have done with hints and inuendos."

Wilkinson looked puzzled. "Oh, very well, Sir—as for that—*I* can have no objection to speak out plainly and boldly to you; I only thought you did not wish it."

"And why so?"

"Because, Sir, you know very well that you don't like to *seem* to know any thing about the matter."

"About what matter?"

"Lord! Sir!—why, begging your pardon, what can be the use of keeping up these sort of pretences among ourselves?—as if we did not both of us know that you were at the bottom of my proceedings against Mr. Morton!"

Lacy's astonishment at this intimation was extreme. He knew that gross deceit must have existed in some quarter, but he had no suspicion of its having been employed upon the suing creditor himself. The investigation which followed brought to light much of the scandalous arts which had been used to deceive him. It appeared that he had been urged, partly by anonymous letters, partly by the actual intervention of Allen, so to arrange the execution of the writ as to distress Mr. Morton in the midst of the election. This being done, he was informed by Allen, that he had conferred a favour upon Mr. Lacy, which would not soon be forgotten; that the plan had his approbation and that he was the writer of the anonymous letters. At the same time, Wilkinson was informed, that Mr. Lacy was one of those affectedly squeamish persons who, though very willing to profit by the misdeeds of others, are loth to admit their concurrence in them, or even their foreknowledge and tacit approbation. He was therefore warned that he would give serious offence, and forfeit the support of Mr. Lacy, if he ever wounded his delicacy by alluding to the part which he bore in the transaction, or even to his own services. He was assured that he would reap the profit of this courtly forbearance, and would gain nothing by the opposite course.

The former assurance seemed soon to be verified. Wilkinson wished to obtain for his son a place in the Excise. Allen was made the depositary of his intentions, and became his adviser in the mode of

proceeding. Instructed by Sackville, he counselled him not to make a direct application to Lacy, but to draw up a memorial, which would be placed by Allen in the hands of that gentleman. This was never done; on the contrary the application was entrusted to Sackville, and, through his exertions, was successful.

Meanwhile, the applicant was made to believe that for this success, he was indebted not to Sackville, but to Lacy; and in order to prevent the discovery of his error, he was warned not to send to Mr. Lacy any letter of acknowledgment, but to express his gratitude to that gentleman through the medium of a letter to Allen, which he would find an opportunity of showing. This letter was never shown to Lacy, and it was obtained with a different intention; it was to be shown to Mr. Morton, and became the means of confirming in his mind the belief of Lacy's treachery.

Lacy could not obtain from Wilkinson a knowledge of this latter circumstance, nor was he yet aware of the extensive part which Sackville had taken in the organization of this plot. He could only be made acquainted with the agency of Allen; but he doubted not that he was employed by another; and his suspicions wavered between Lord Rodborough and Sackville. The latter was not connected with the borough; but he appeared, even on the showing of Wilkinson, to have some share in the transaction; and Lacy, who now began to take a truer estimate of his character, could easily conceive that jealousy might prompt Sackville to endeavour to injure him in the opinions of the Mortons.

The anger and surprise of the unfortunate Wilkinson, in finding that he had been so completely duped, was much more violently expressed than

the more just indignation of Lacy. Fortunately for Lacy, the former was so much incensed against Allen, for having rendered him so blind a tool, that he gladly consented to lend his assistance in unmasking that person and in undeceiving Mr. Morton. He went home to commence a search for written proofs of Allen's delinquency; and returning to Wichcombe, placed in Lacy's hands one of the anonymous letters which had been attributed to him, and also a letter from Allen, which, though not explanatory, contained sufficient allusions to afford a strong confirmation of the statements of Wilkinson. The anonymous letter bore the mark of the post town, nearest to Lacy Park, and was an excellent imitation of Lacy's hand. In delivering up these letters, Wilkinson gave Lacy full permission to make of them whatever use he pleased; and he also consented to accompany him to town.

Lacy arrived in London on the evening of that day which witnessed the last interview between Sackville and Allen. Having matured his plan of operations, he went, early the following morning, to the house where Allen was residing. He resolved to try the efficacy of a surprise in a private conference with that person. He succeeded in finding Allen alone; and then, without preparing him by any preamble for that which was to follow, placed before him the anonymous letter, and demanded whether he had ever seen it before. Allen knew it well, and could not forbear starting with evident consternation, at the unexpected sight. However, he quickly recovered himself, and began to disclaim all knowledge of the letter: but it was done with awkwardness and hesitation, for he felt that his manner had betrayed him, and that he had evinced a surprise, which could never have

appeared if he had not seen the letter before. Nevertheless, he was proceeding with his denial, when Lacy stopped him.

"Allen," said he, sternly, "this is useless. I know what has passed, as my possession of this letter may convince you. I have also another written by you, which I obtained from Wilkinson. He has told me every thing, and I have brought him to town, that he may lay the circumstances, if necessary, before my solicitor. Your safest course is to make a full declaration of all you know; and in that case, and that only, your conduct may be overlooked. I am aware that my character has been shamefully attacked; but as I do not yet know that it has been injured in the opinion of any except Mr. Morton, I shall be satisfied with an explanation before him, without having recourse to law; but I shall certainly avail myself of that method of redress, if you refuse to make a full confession. I believe that you have not been acting simply on your own account, but are the instrument of some other person, and I demand to be told, in the first instance, who that person is."

Allen looked frightened and abashed; but his habitual caution did not desert him. "I hope, Sir," said he, "you will excuse me, if I don't answer you immediately. Whether a man is innocent or guilty, it is never prudent to reply offhand, to these kind of questions. You seem to threaten me with an action. Now, Sir, if a man were to threaten me with an action, even in a case where the right was clearly on my side, I should think myself very impudent, if I were to snap my fingers, and tell him to do his worst. It is not pleasant to get into law whether one wins or loses. I would always take time for consideration; and therefore, Sir, I hope you will not be offended at

my proposing, that when I have heard all you wish to say, I may be allowed to wait upon you in the course of a few hours with my answer."

"To that," replied Lacy, "I shall not agree. Either you will go with me from hence to Mr. Morton's, and explain in his presence the part that you have taken, or I shall consider your silence as a refusal, and proceed with Wilkinson to my solicitor. You may deside at your leisure, but it shall be in my presence. I will have no consultations with confederates."

Lacy then turned away, and taking up a newspaper, left Allen to his own reflections.

That wary person was much embarrassed by Lacy's promptitude and firmness, and found himself unexpectedly brought into a situation of considerable difficulty. He took a rapid mental survey of all that could be adduced in favour of the policy, either of submission or resistance; and found that there was most to be said for the former. It was true, that in that case he must forfeit all chance of extorting money from the fears of Sackville; but a late interview had taught him, that such expectations were but slightly founded. He had already quarrelled with Sackville, and defied his powers; and in exposing him before Lacy and Mr. Morton, he should be gratifying one strong passion of his heart—revenge. He also knew that Sackville's credit was on the wane; and it therefore became advisable to dissolve all connection with a man who would soon cease to be a creditable patron.

In failure of him, it was desirable to attach himself to the service of some more eligible chief. Lacy was a rising man, of good expectations, and esteemed by the world; and if Allen could, by an earnest reparation of the injuries he had commit-

ted, and by apparent zeal for his cause induce Lacy to overlook the numerous attendant stains upon his honesty, and lend him his future countenance and protection, he might hope to derive no slight advantage. These were some of the sentiments that flashed across the mind of Allen, and they disposed him to make his peace with Lacy, and to lay open the iniquities of Sackville.

This important step was immediately taken; and in a short time Lacy became possessed of a complete knowledge of the various arts which had been employed against him, by the man whom he once thought his friend. When Allen had opened his communications, he took care to gain some credit to himself, by making them full and satisfactory, and extending them to every particular in which Lacy was likely to be interested. They therefore embraced not only the machinations of which Lacy seemed the immediate object, but those by which Sackville had effected his engagement with Miss Morton.

Deep was the disgust and indignation of Lacy, as this dark picture of subtle villainy was gradually unfolded. His surprise was less; for it could hardly be said that the truth had burst upon him unexpectedly. The communication did but serve to confirm previous suspicions of foul play, for which he had formerly reproached himself, and which he had tried to dismiss, as illiberal and ungrounded.

But it was now no time to dwell on retrospects. The present emergency called for action. The course of explanation was only begun, and much misunderstanding was still to be removed, between Lacy and Mr. Morton. A letter was immediately sent to the latter, by Lacy, from Allen's abode. It requested, in pressing terms, the favour of an admission to an immediate conference, and with-

ntering into any explanatory details, briefly
ied its important object.
favourable answer was returned; and Lacy,
led by Allen and Wilkinson, repaired to the
of Mr. Morton.

CHAPTER XXVI.

Telle est la force d'un sentiment vrai que, lorsqu'il parle, les interpretations fausses et les convenances factises se taisent.
B. CONSTANT. *Adolphe.*

To detail the progress of the investigation which took place in the presence of Mr. Morton, would be merely to recapitulate circumstances with which our readers are already acquainted. Suffice it to say that, in the course of that conference, the artifices of Sackville were completely unmasked, and the integrity of Lacy established, in a manner that carried entire conviction to the mind of Mr. Morton.

Sackville, meanwhile, remained in ignorance of the event which tended so materially to affect his views; and knew not that, in one hour, the specious fabric of artifice, which he had so long and anxiously reared, had crumbled to dust beneath the touch of truth. Such had been the promptitude of Lacy's proceedings, that the interviews with Allen and with Mr. Morton had both taken place, before Sackville knew that he was returned to London.

On the morning after Sackville's last angry conference with Allen, he was engaged with business, and obliged to forego an intended visit to the Mortons. Having, however, despatched his affairs, he was on the point of bending his course towards the residence of the Mortons, when a packet was put into his hand. It was in Mr. Morton's hand-

writing; and Sackville, on perusing it found, with shame and dismay, that it contained a full and circumstantial statement of many of those parts of his past conduct which he was most desirous of concealing. The communication was also accompanied with copies of those letters and papers, the possession of which he had been so anxious to obtain from Allen. In short, the exposure seemed to have been complete; and the concluding part of the letter showed that the impression made by it upon the sentiments of Mr. Morton, was of the most unfavourable kind. It refused to admit Sackville to a personal conference, until he had sent, in writing, a denial of the truth of the allegations made against him and of the authenticity of the letters and papers which supported them.

"If," pursued Mr. Morton, "you cannot make this denial, and also establish its correctness; if you cannot remove the opinion, which (though much against my will) I am now bound to entertain, by contrary testimony of as powerful a description; if you cannot impugn the veracity of Allen, it is almost needless for me to say that we can no longer meet on the same terms as formerly, and it will be better for both of us if we never meet again. Your character must be thoroughly cleared from every stain that has been cast upon it by the disclosures which I transmit to you, before I can admit you to an alliance with my family. My daughter, who is informed of all, will, if she does not see you justified, assuredly dissolve her engagement; and were she disposed to act otherwise, I myself should interpose the authority of a parent to save her from a union with dishonour."

In these few concluding sentences Sackville viewed the extinction of those hopes which he had so long and fondly cherished. He was debarred from the only means by which he could hope to re-

trieve his lost credit. The adventitious aids of manner and address, his persuasive sophistry, and artful insinuation, which could have been employed so effectually in a personal conference, were peremptorily denied him; and he was bidden, in a spirit of stern justice, to combat facts by facts, and rest his defence upon a plain, unvarnished statement of the truth. He meditated long upon the possibility of accomplishing his vindication in the undelusive method that had been prescribed, and, with bitter repining, acknowledged that it was hopeless. He felt that, from that moment, his engagement with Agnes was virtually dissolved. He was defeated: but ever mindful of securing to himself every possible advantage, no sooner had he made this mortifying acknowledgment, than he resolved to turn upon his accusers, and assume the lofty air of injured rectitude and proud defiance.

His answer to Mr. Morton was written in this spirit. "I scorn," said he, "to reply to the mass of calumnies which have been levelled against me—I shall not stoop to expose them. They are too flimsy to have weight in the mind of any one who does not wish to believe them true. Little did I imagine that even an enemy could be found who would so greedily receive them—still less that they would be entitled to immediate credit from the man who has so long professed himself my friend. But it seems that I have been grievously deceived. You say true, Sir, 'we can no longer meet on the same terms as formerly, and it will be better for both of us if we never meet again.' I thank you for speaking so plainly on the subject of my intended marriage with your daughter. Sincerity has come late; but I am glad that it should have appeared at all. You had a wound to inflict, and you have done it with an unshrinking haste, which does credit to your firmness and decision, and which my worst

foe might have reason to admire. You have not scrupled to profess your willingness to discard me, even before your have heard my vindication. You hint that Agnes is no less willing to think ill of me than yourself, and I am not permitted to have any other testimony than your assurance. If true, it is a cruel return for years of love and zealous devotion. The intimation is, without doubt, meant to wound me deeply, and it does. But I will make no parade of what I feel.

"Little as my feelings have been consulted, I am still desirous to spare yours. I will save you, Sir, the painful task of interposing the 'authority of a parent' to save your daughter from 'a union with dishonour.' I resign the prospect of her hand. My wife she can never be, after that which you have thought proper to declare; but as long as my influence lasts, you must not expect me to consent to her becoming the wife of another. I owe it to myself to express, in this manner, my sense of the treatment I have received. I might have expressed that sense of my wrongs more harshly; I might have allowed the breach of our contract—a written contract, which I have in my possession—to have proceeded entirely from your daughter; and the law would have given me my revenge. But, meanly as you may prize me, I have too much delicacy and honour to drag her name before the public, and render the history of our past engagement a subject for the retailers of scandalous gossip and the purveyors of a licentious press."

Thus wrote Sackville, after an exposure against which he could not defend himself, which blasted his character, destroyed his hopes, and ought to have covered him with shame and confusion. He had endeavoured, and not unsuccessfully, to assume the proud bearing of conscious virtue. He knew that he was opposed by facts; but his was the effort of desperation. The difficulties of his situation in-

spired him with a kind of reckless energy, and he resolved to swagger himself out of the galling sense of his own debasement.

Experience too often teaches us that outward signs of shame and humiliation are not necessarily attendant upon detected guilt. It is not to be supposed that depraved characters have that sensitive consciousness of their situation which honourably minded persons, judging from their own sentiments, naturally imagine them to feel. Neither is it to be supposed that, even if they did feel much, they would suffer it to become apparent. It is not likely that the dissimulation and sophistry of which a person has long availed himself, should desert him at his utmost need; or that, when reduced to the resource of his own address, that address should not be powerfully exerted in covering his defeat.

It is among the trials of our state, that neither does the course of guilt appear so hateful, nor its punishment so severe and certain, as we conceive it ought to be; and that the acknowledged villain shall walk through the world with as bold a carriage as his honest neighbour, shaking the confidence of the feebly virtuous, and dispensing encouragement to the minor scoundrels that strive to emulate his audacity. But let it not be imagined that where no punishment is seen to fall, it will necessarily follow that none is felt. Let not the probable existence of "that within which passeth show," be utterly forgotten. Let it rather be believed, that the wound is most severe in him who labours most to hide it; and that he is not least a prey to secret shame, who most proudly blazons his contempt of censure.

Sackville's audacious spirit of retaliation was not confined to the letter from which we have given the foregoing extract. On the following morning he called upon Lacy, whom he found alone. He entered with a reserved and lofty air, and met

Lacy's eye with a firmness that induced the latter to believe at first that he was still ignorant of the disclosures that had taken place.

But Sackville's first words undeceived him. Drawing himself up into an attitude of defiance, and fixing his eyes upon Lacy, with a most severe and apalling scrutiny, he sternly demanded,

"Mr. Lacy, do you believe that I have injured you?"

The reply was given in one word—"Yes."

Then followed a pause—a pause of expectation in Lacy, of surprise and embarrassment on the part of Sackville. The latter was quite disconcerted by the unexpected plainness and brevity of Lacy's answer. He had formed for Lacy, in his own mind, a very different reply, to which he had provided a pointed and powerful rejoinder; but that decisive monosyllable had rendered all his tactics useless. Nevertheless, his usual promptitude in resources did not desert him.

"I admire your sincerity, Sir," said he to Lacy, "though I think your opinions might have been somewhat more charitable. I am then to understand that, on the word of a rascally land-surveyor, you are willing to believe that I have acted dishonourably, though you have not yet heard my defence."

"Yes," again replied Lacy; "but I wish to hear that defence, and shall be glad to find reason for changing my opinion."

"And do you think, Sir," retorted Sackville, scornfully, "that I came here with the paltry object of defending myself against the calumnies which a low-born miscreant may choose to utter, and which you, in your charity, may think proper to believe?"

"I cannot tell what is your object," said Lacy, "but if it had been to correct a misrepresentation; I could not have considered it a paltry or unworthy

one. If I am in error, I am sorry for it; and still more that you should wish me to remain so. I may reasonably regret that so little value is put upon my good opinion."

"Doubtless, you may," replied Sackville, with a sneer; "but you need not let that wound your pride. I should not prize the good opinion of any man, were he the best and greatest in the land, if that good opinion could be resigned as easily as yours has been. I repeat, Sir, I do not come here to defend myself; but, I do not choose that you or any man should construe my silence into shame or fear, or suppose that, because I scorn to reply, I am willing to acknowledge the justice of all the slander that has been uttered against me. I can face my accusers, and boldly too, as you can testify; and I leave you to judge, whether that would have been the case, if all were true that is said against me. Mark my words, Mr. Lacy, the time may come when you will repent of having so willingly thought ill of me. I will not boast of what you owe me—let your own conscience tell you that. Meanwhile, pursue your own course. I am no humble suitor for your gratitude—no, nor for your silence. If you wish to trumpet forth the history of your imaginary wrongs, do it. If you wish to extol your own forbearance, while you are reviling me behind my back in every company you enter, do it. If you wish to blacken the character of one to whom you owe more than you ever can repay, in the name of all that is mean, treacherous and ungrateful, do it. Say your worst—I do not fear it. My reputation stands too firm to be shaken by a word of yours. The mischief will only recoil upon the heads of its agents. Use your tongue freely and boldly—I shall not call you to account, It would do me little credit to be killed by you,

and my principles will not allow me to take a life which I once saved."

The object of this violent and galling speech was not only to assume the proud security of conscious innocence, but to irritate Lacy into some unguarded act or expression, which might give Sackville an advantage over him. But Lacy, though, perhaps, not qualified to contend with Sackville in subtlety, had that firmness of principle, and rectitude of intention, which stood him in better stead than art. He regarded Sackville when he had ended, with a steadiness, before which the eye of the latter momentarily fell.

"Mr. Sackville," he said, "what creditable purpose can this bravado serve? If you wished to insult and give me pain, you have succeeded; but if you wished to goad me into revengeful violence and forgetfulness, you have not succeeded, nor ever shall. I have volunteered no charge against you, and I ask you for no reparation. The injury that was done, has already been repaired without your interposition; and my desire, from that moment, was to forget that you had ever been my enemy. You are safe, Sir, from all attacks of mine, and I shall never, henceforth, breathe a syllable to your disadvantage. I am inclined to believe that you were conscious of your safety, and secretly did me the justice to think that I should not act so mean a part. In either case, it would have been more generous and noble, to have withheld your taunts. You might also have withheld your allusion to a duel, and your attempted reflection on my courage, which I heartily despise, and, as you well know, with reason. It argued little of the magnanimity to which you lay claim, to have boasted reproachfully of the service you once afforded me. You did me a cruel injustice in assuming that I required to be reminded of it. I can never forget it, and I

must always be grateful. You have done much, and you may do more, to lessen that gratitude; but nothing ever ought to extinguish it. You have cruelly sported with my character, and belied me with those whose esteem I had most reason to value. You have embittered many a past hour. You have done that which might have caused me to hate you; but I thank God I do not, nor will I ever injure you, if I can help it."

Sackville seemed moved. A flush of upbraiding shame passed hastily across his features. A severe internal struggle appeared to agitate his mind, and he turned away to conceal its visible indications from the eye of Lacy.

"I am sensible, Sir," said he at length, with a more softened manner, and in a tone of mournful seriousness, "that the term of our intimacy has come to a close. After I have quitted this room, we may never meet again; we shall certainly never speak to each other; but I will not leave you with the impression that I have not the courage to confess my faults. I acknowledge that I *have* injured you."

He then requested a pen and paper, and sat down to write. His letter (for such it seemed) was very short, and occupied him only a few minutes. When he had finished, he sealed it; and having written on the outside, placed it in Lacy's hands. In lieu of direction, were the following words:—"To be opened by Mr. Lacy, only in the presence of Mr. Morton, and not until he has received express permission in writing from me. E. SACKVILLE."

Lacy read these words with surprise, and looked at Sackville, as if to request an explanation.

"I see," said the latter, "that you think my conduct strange, and perhaps suspicious; but it will be satisfactorily explained whenever that pa-

per shall be opened. But before I leave it in your hands, I must require your solemn promise never to open it but in the presence of Mr. Morton, after having received permission from me. You must also promise, that should I at any time require you to destroy this paper, you will instantly burn it unopened."

Lacy promised to fulfil either injunction faithfully.

"I know," added Sackville, "that I am dealing with a man of honour, and that when your word is given, it will be kept. I do not know whether the confidence I now place in you deserves to be considered as any reparation for the pain I may once have caused you. If I were to say so, I should, perhaps, be rating much too highly the value of my own good opinion. At any rate, Sir, I am glad that the last opinion of your character, which you will now hear me utter, should be so favourable. I hope it will prove just. Farewell!"

So saying, he suddenly turned away, and before Lacy was aware of his intentions, and could return that adieu which was to be their last, Sackville had left him.

CHAPTER XXVII.

> Beseech you, Sir, be merry; you have cause
> (So have we all) of joy; for our escape
> Is much beyond our loss!
>
> *Tempest.*

Previous to the foregoing interview between Lacy and Sackville, Sackville's letter had been received by Mr. Morton, and Agnes had been told that she was free. The announcement was received with deep and overpowering emotion; and after a vain struggle to control her feelings, she burst into tears. They were tears neither of sorrow nor of joy; they were the overflowings of an oppressed and agitated spirit, which no longer sought to struggle against the weakness of its nature, when the exertion of self-command was no longer necessary, and the time of trial was past.

But joy did succeed to these emotions when their bitterness had subsided, and allowed her to reflect on her present happier situation; and fervently did she thank Heaven for having saved her from that most sure and enduring of human evils—a marriage without affection.

Lacy, at the time of his interview with Sackville, was not informed of all that had passed between him and the Mortons. He knew not that Sackville had renounced all further communication

with that family, and that his engagement with Agnes was dissolved. This interesting fact became known to him only after the lapse of many days, and through the information of a common acquaintance, who had heard it from Lord Malvern. Subsequent reports confirmed the first, and Lacy was soon relieved from all doubt upon the subject.

Believing that Agnes had never felt any affection for Sackville, and was engaged to him against her wishes, Lacy sincerely rejoiced in her deliverance. But he could not feel that his own prospects were materially brightened. He was pledged to Miss Hartley, and though he did not love her, he had too much honour even to meditate the desertion of her for another. Still he reflected that one great barrier was removed, that there was now no insuperable obstacle, and that Agnes might possibly become his, could he resolve to be so cruel and perfidious as to break his faith with Charlotte Hartley. She had now no guarantee but the firmness and rectitude of his resolution, and he vowed that she should not find it wanting.

But Lacy did not confide presumptuously in his own strength of principle, but felt the necessity of employing every method that occupation and absence could afford, to overcome his attachment to Agnes. He knew that her presence must now be doubly dangerous to him, and he formed the painful determination of never seeing her again till he was married to Miss Hartley. He even meditated quitting London, lest he should accidentally meet her in society: but this intention was rendered needless, by an arrangement which was made by the Mortons themselves.

After the quarrel with Sackville, the intended departure of the Mortons to the Continent, which was to have taken place immediately, was postpon-

ed till the middle of summer, and an offer was made them which would enable them to pass the intervening time more pleasantly than in their humble dwelling in London. The Duke of Swansea, whose intended nuptials we announced some time ago, had lately married, and after passing the first half of his honey moon at a villa at Twickenham, had gone with his bride abroad. On this occasion, the Duke, not knowing the intentions of the Mortons to travel, good naturedly offered them the use of his villa, and they, having now changed their plan, gladly closed with the proposal. They accordingly quitted town for Twickenham, and signified their intention of remaining there till they went abroad.

This circumstance, with which Lacy became acquainted, was sufficient to remove his fears of meeting Agnes again in London. But this was a cruel and melancholy cause for satisfaction; and Lacy could not suppress some bitter repinings, even when he felt that he ought to rejoice. He allowed that it was better that they should be far apart; but when he considered that she was soon to go into a foreign land; that seas were to divide them, and that she might probably stay many years, nay, perhaps die abroad, and that he might never see her more; he could not bear the picture that he had formed, and his eyes filled with tears at the melancholy thought.

He resolved (it was a foolish project, as he half allowed, but he could not forego it,) he resolved to discover the day of her departure, and shortly before it came, to see her for the last time. He did not mean to address her: he did not even mean that she should see him. He meant, unperceived, to steal a last look at her whom he loved, to treasure up her image in his memory, and hurry back, and be wretched.

One morning, about a fortnight after Lacy's interview with Sackville, he received a letter, bearing the post-mark of a small town in the north of England, and written in a female hand. Lacy knew nobody in that neighbourhood from which it was sent, nor did he recognize either the seal, the hand, or the initials of the writer. It was a hasty scrawl, the substance of which, when decyphered, proved to be as follows:—

"I hardly know whether you will be surprised or not when you hear of the step I have taken; but I hope you will not have been quite deceived, for I think you must have suspected what my real sentiments were. I assure you it has not been my wish to behave disingenuously. I wanted, several months ago, to have made the communication to you in confidence, but you would not let me, though I cannot help thinking that you almost knew what I was going to say. If that was the case, you can easily excuse me, as I shall not have been the only person to blame. I cannot, however, help feeling that, under all circumstances, you ought to receive the intimation sooner than any body else, and this is the reason for my now venturing to write to you. I cannot say more at present, for I scarcely know how to address you upon such a subject; and, I assure you, it is very unpleasant for me to write at all, and I should not have done it, if I had not thought it proper."

Here followed the signature, which consisted solely of the letters C. L.

Lacy was completely puzzled. He could not divine the meaning of this mysterious note, nor could he discover its writer. He judged it to have come from a lady. It had all the neat and elegant characteristics of a female hand, so easily distinguishable from that of a man, and yet so hard to be identified; so small, and faint, and flowing, and, unlike the scrawls of the other sex, still beautiful

when scarcely legible. There were the usual exuberant capitals, the flourishing heads of the *d's* and the long, curly tails of the *g*'s, *y*'s, *f*'s, and *z*'s; the indistinguishable similarity of all the five vowels, and the common confusion of *n*'s and *m*'s with *u*'s and *w*'s. Lacy was acquainted with two ladies whose initials were C. L., but why either of them should write to him at all, much less so singular a letter, was more than he could comprehend. If it was a hoax, which he partly suspected, he could only say, that it was a very poor one.

At length, however, on his reading the letter over again, an idea suddenly flashed across his mind, which threw a new and singular light upon the circumstance. Doubts and suspicions arose, which he became inexpressibly anxious to satisfy, and he waited, in the most eager suspense, for the arrival of the next day's post. It came, and brought the following letter from his sister.

"My dear Herbert,

"I have a very unpleasant task to perform. I am to acquaint you with an event which has caused no slight grief and surprise to us all, and at which I am sure none will be more astonished than yourself. Charlotte has left us. She went away on Tuesday without our knowledge, and is now married to Mr. Luscombe. I feel quite bewildered, and at times can hardly believe it true. Considering all circumstances, I own the step she has taken is beyond my comprehension. That she was once attached to you cannot be doubted, nor could I ever perceive that the attachment declined, or that the engagement was irksome to her. But you have probably seen more, and can explain what has happened better than I can. I fear that she at length perceived your indifference to her, and was driven by that painful discovery to her present rash and unfortunate proceeding. If she has been in-

fluenced by pique, I am afraid she feels no attachment to the present object of her choice. I dread to think that such is the case, for it would be a terrible aggravation of the evils of this unfortunate affair.

"I hope you cannot accuse yourself of having led to it, by any change of manner towards poor Charlotte. Though you may be glad of a release, I think you would be sorry to have purchased it at such a price. I trust, however, that she may still be happy. Angry as I must feel with Mr. Luscombe, for his treacherous and deceitful conduct, I cannot but admit that he has some pleasing qualities. He is fortunately not so much Charlotte's superior in intellect as you would have been; and there will be more of that equality which is essential to conjugal happiness. I fear he has been influenced, chiefly, by mercenary considerations, and has no real love for her: but she is of an easy temper, and not romantic in her notions, and, provided he treats her well, will probably be satisfied with the mere decencies of moderate affection. I will do him the justice to say, that I think his natural obligingness will prevent him from ever being a harsh or unfeeling husband; and as Charlotte's intellectual wants are not extensive, I trust that good humour in a partner, will almost suffice to make her happy. It is a very different match from such as I could have wished for her, but the evil is now past remedy, and we must try to make the best of it.

"Charles is just returned from his fruitless pursuit. He saw his sister, who said that she had written to you. I wonder at it, but perhaps she thought that a letter would be some compensation for having used you so ill. I would have written sooner, but I did not like to send you any report till I knew the whole truth.

"I went over to Lacy yesterday, and saw my

mother, who is very much afflicted at Charlotte's elopement. What chiefly harasses her now, is the fear of a duel between you and Mr. Luscombe. I hope nothing of the kind is to be apprehended, and so I tell her, but she will not believe me. Pray write soon, and set her mind at ease. This unpleasant affair has obliged us to defer, for a short time, our coming up to town: but I hope you may find us there in the course of a fortnight."

Great was the surprise of Lacy at this unexpected release from his protracted state of thraldom. Serious as the event was, and disposed as he must be to regret the folly of an act which gave such displeasure to his nearest relations, he could scarcely resist a smile at Lady Lacy's fears lest he should call Luscombe severely to account. He even forgot all mortification at the deception which had been practised upon him, in thoughts of the happy prospects which his deliverance opened. He had been a prey to the most gloomy presages, the most bitter regrets, and now all was sunshine. He might truly be said to have earned the happiness of the present moment, by the honourable firmness of his late resolutions. He had not sown the seeds of repentance, by wavering in his plighted faith to Charlotte Hartley, but could look back upon his past intentions with the honest glow of self-approval.

It is a galling thing to be jilted, especially when the jilting is accompanied with the breach of a positive engagement. Lacy knew that he had every possible right to be exceedingly indignant; yet never did he experience the slightest anger, and when he called to mind the ambiguous conversation which he once held with Miss Hartley, and to which she alluded in her letter, he was rather inclined to laugh at the remembrance of their mutual misconception. The knowledge of her intended confession, served in some degree to acquit her, in his opinion, of the

charge of deceit; therefore the weight of his displeasure, had he felt any, must have fallen upon Mr. Luscombe.

But Luscombe was not the sort of person against whom he could entertain a very lofty indignation. He also surmised, and very truly, that this gentleman was not unconscious of his real sentiments with regard to Miss Hartley; and that he knew, that in carrying off that Lady, he should not be robbing Lacy of a treasure, the loss of which he would very deeply resent.

That Miss Hartley should have preferred to Lacy, one so much his inferior in every respect as Luscombe, may at first appear strange; but it is easily explained. It has been already sufficiently shown that she was not qualified to estimate the superiority of Lacy at its proper rate. On the other hand, she was quick enough to discover, in spite of Lacy's uniform kindness and civility of manner, that he did not care for her, nay more, that he despised her. It is difficult, perhaps impossible, to love, under circumstances like these: to some minds it would be easier to hate. Indeed, it is not improbable that Miss Hartley might have been partly supported in her system of deceit, by the hope of proving her superiority in artifice, over one who had presumed to undervalue her capacity. She felt that her mind had little in common with Lacy's, whereas between herself and Luscombe, there was a constant congruity of sentiment, much of which was artfully assumed by the latter. She felt humbled before Lacy, but was elevated and flattered by the homage of Luscombe, who was all deference and attention. From the society of the latter, she derived constant pleasure; from that of the former, much occasional entertainment, but always blended with a painful sense of inferiority.

When such was the case, it is not wonderful that she would have preferred the bland, obsequious

Luscombe. Luscombe was the author of the deceitful course which Miss Hartley adopted towards Lacy, and of her eventual elopement. He was not devoid of regard for her, nor was he insensible to her beauty, but his principal object was her fortune. He had little himself, and knew that in the event of an open courtship and proposal, he should be strongly opposed by her relations. Secrecy was therefore his only chance of success: and fortunately for his designs, he found Miss Hartley to be one of those weak, timid characters, who are naturally disposed to prefer dissimulation to openness, and seek to defend themselves by the resources of artifice.

Being an intimate acquaintance of her brother, Luscombe had frequent opportunities of seeing the young lady, and had secured her affections, and exchanged vows even before the period at which this story commences. But he had long to wait, for Miss Hartley would not be of age till the end of the ensuing April, and by previous elopement he should fail in accomplishing his principal object. In the mean time, he contrived to blind her brother, and even the superior discernment of his lady, by affecting not to admire Miss Hartley, and professing himself a confirmed bachelor. With an admirable air of sincerity he concurred with the real wishes of Lady Lacy, and the pretended ones of Mrs. Hartley, that Herbert should be married to Charlotte; and when the engagement was actually announced, nobody spoke of it with greater pleasure both to them and their acquaintance.

This elopement was a severe and just punishment to Mrs. Hartley. Not only were her projects frustrated, but she was defeated with her own weapons, by persons whose talent and address she justly held to be inferior to her own. But in the ignominious warfare of cunning, the victory, as is meet, depends not upon those qualities of which

any one has reason to be proud. The possession of high endowments is rather unfavourable to success. It induces a dangerous confidence, a disposition to bold and open measures, and a disregard of those petty advantages of which meaner craft will not scruple to avail itself. Mrs. Hartley, it is true, was not calculated to feel the lofty security and noble unsuspiciousness of her brother; but she was undoubtedly led, by a consciousness of address, to place too great a reliance on her own discrimination, and to pay too little attention to the actions of Charlotte Hartley and Mr. Luscombe, from the very erroneous belief that, let them do what they would, they could never deceive her.

CHAPTER XXIII.

> Wooing thee I found thee of more value
> Than stamps in gold, or sums in sealed bags,
> And 'tis the very riches of thyself
> That now I aim at.
>
> *Merry Wives of Windsor.*

The time was now past when Lacy would consider it his duty to avoid the society of Agnes. All the serious obstacles which had opposed his love for her were now removed, and he accordingly made an early use of his newly acquired liberty, and called upon the Mortons at their residence at Twickenham. They had heard of Miss Hartley's marriage; and though scarcely any allusion could be made to such a subject, there was at least sufficient to satisfy Lacy that they were informed of his release.

He saw Agnes, and though it was but for a short time, and their conversation was unimportant, there was a conscious timidity in her manner towards him, and a blush on her cheek at the first meeting, from which he drew the happiest auguries. He staid long, and contrived to implicate himself in a commission for Lady Louisa, which would afford him an excellent reason for calling soon again. The second visit secured to Lacy a still greater degree of friendly intimacy with the family, and an invitation to dine with them *en famille* on a following day.

It was then, during the absence of the ladies after dinner, that the name of Sackville was first introduced, and in the course of conversation, Mr. Morton mentioned his office of trustee under the

will of Mrs. [illegible] by possessed of [illegible] pounds. of the [illegible] marrying before the age of [illegible] consent.

"That consent [illegible] ens to [illegible] absolutely impossible [illegible] My daughter [illegible] an heiress [illegible] This is no family secret [illegible] not have mentioned it."

There was nothing in the [illegible] Mr. Morton [illegible] had been made with a [illegible] could easily [illegible] plated the possibility of a [illegible] to Agnes, and had [illegible] advertently, a piece of information [illegible] vent Lady [illegible] were merely [illegible] pursuit. Lady also [illegible] declaration that the [illegible] might be received by [illegible] municate it to her father [illegible] letter to Sir W[illegible] served his attachment to [illegible] no objection was made [illegible] reason to think that he had [illegible] apprehend. He [illegible] sumptuous to make [illegible] fore he had offered [illegible] enough to convince him that [illegible] ties, they were not [illegible] tioned the circumstances [illegible] and expressed some pleasure [illegible] Agnes should have no reason to [illegible] was sought on account of any other merit than that of affection.

Lacy soon received an answer from his father, of which the following is a part.

"Do not expect me to be as liberally-minded as yourself. I shall not like Miss Morton a bit the better for having only ten thousand pounds instead of eighty thousand. But you need not let this alarm you. I shall like her well enough to allow her to be your wife—or rather, I like you well enough to allow you to be happy in your own way. But as the question is one of money, it will be better for me to tell you the state of my circumstances, and the allowance that I can make you, and then you will be able to judge for yourself."

After some details, which it is needless to transcribe, the letter proceeded thus:

"You know what you have to expect, and may shape your course accordingly. With the addition of ten thousand pounds to your allowance you may be comfortable—with eighty thousand, affluent. Weigh these circumstances well. Fix the amount of what you conceive to be a competency. Measure accurately your own disposition to contentment, and, if possible, that of your intended bride. Dismiss, for a moment, your visions of love, and in a cool, cold, worldly vein of prudence, think how far wealth is essential to your happiness. This being done, you may be once more as romantic as you please. Consider too, that, by your own showing, if you choose to wait four years, you may marry Miss Morton without incurring the loss of the seventy thousand pounds. Reflect, then, for a moment, on the amazing prodigality of your love. Think that if you marry Miss Morton immediately, you and that lady will be expending, in attachment, the monstrous sum of seventeen thousand, five hundred pounds per annum, which is much more than I humbly conceive any other pair of affections to be fairly worth. You will, perhaps, decide that your own are worth more, and I shall not

quarrel with you for nobody can be compelled [illegible] settle that point but yourselves.

"I again repeat—be cautious and considerate. Pursue a wise and even mean between the romantic disregard of money and the illiberal [illegible] it; and know your own mind so thoroughly that you may leave nothing to be discovered when too late to remedy. If you propose to Miss Burton, acquaint her fairly immediately with the extent of your pecuniary allowance. Let her know that I am informed of the circumstance of your relation, and let her be supposed that [illegible] your marrying for fortune."

After this [illegible] remained for Lacy to [illegible] the consent of Agnes [illegible] not feel very [illegible] less aware that [illegible] delay, and a few [illegible] in which each of them [illegible] ever well be [illegible] much for [illegible] tion for Sarah [illegible] with one [illegible] honour, she was [illegible] by the appearance [illegible]

Almost [illegible] ence to Miss Harley [illegible] al difficulty. [illegible] the circumstances [illegible] ment, and [illegible] ceeded either from [illegible] or what was [illegible] ther impression [illegible] and it was [illegible] not entertain [illegible]

Such were the [illegible] Lacy, in spite of the [illegible] to see Agnes frequently [illegible]

in a proposal. Without employing a single expression indicative of attachment, he could easily cause her to perceive the enchaining pleasure which her society gave him, and he talked to her with an interest which could betoken nothing less than an approaching declaration: but he never saw her alone, and he could not introduce that subject which was nearest to his heart, without such an opportunity.

At length, however, the opportunity arrived. He found her one morning alone in the shrubbery which encircled the villa, and inclined, in a gentle slope, towards the river. There was a cheerful beauty in the scene, which animated, and enlivened, and tended to dispel that feeling of reserve, which rendered an allusion to past events, not only difficult but painful. Lacy was enabled to mention in her presence, for the first time, the name of Miss Hartley, and failed not to avail himself of the introduction of such a subject, to tell her the origin and motives of his engagement, and the delusion in which he had remained.

Agnes heard him in silence, not unaccompanied with agitation, for she judged that a communication of so interesting a nature, could not be made without an object. Lacy observed every passing expression of her countenance, and could almost collect the import of her meditations.

"I hope," said he, "you will not be surprised or displeased at my venturing to tell you so much of the history of my own feelings. I think you must have observed that I entertain no common anxiety for your good opinion. The event which has happened, would, under any other circumstances, have been very painful to me; but you see that it is not, and I am sure you would have reason to think me a very unfeeling, cold-hearted person, if you did not know what my sentiments had been, and what it was that led to my engagement,

Won't you allow that it would have been so—that but for this explanation, you would have thought me cold-hearted and fickle!"

"Perhaps I should," replied Agnes, timidly, and blushing as she spoke.

"And that," pursued Lacy, "is the last character I should wish you to give me: but perhaps I have not cleared myself sufficiently, and you think me so still?"

"I am almost afraid to answer you," said Agnes, "for I do not feel privileged to judge; but since you desire it, I will venture to say, that I think you can hardly be accused of fickleness, since it appears, by your account, that you have always felt the same."

The countenance of Lacy brightened with pleasure at these words, and Agnes discovered, with confusion, that her expressions admitted of another application besides that which she intended. She was hastily attempting to qualify their meaning, when Lacy interposed.

"Do not," said he, "do not endeavour to unsay what is so true, and so delightful. I have indeed, always felt the same, since those happy days which I passed in your society at Huntley. Often have I been on the point of avowing it, and never has it been relinquished, even when your own engagement put a stop to every hope. Months then passed without my seeing you, and I became pledged to another, and I hoped, for it became a duty, that I had conquered my former feelings; but I saw you again, and all my admiration and attachment was revived as strongly as before—I tried to forget you—but I could not, and now I know that I never can.

He had taken her hand, and she made no effort to withdraw it. Her face was turned away, and concealed by the other hand, and Lacy was not allowed to discover the emotion with which his de-

claration was received, but by the beautiful colour which suffused her neck. She made no reply; but so delightful to Lacy was her silence, that he scarcely wished even for the sound of that sweet voice which to his ear was ever music. He knew that if his suit had seemed presumptuous, or been felt to be unwelcome, she would have spoken to repress him; but she had not, and he was at liberty to indulge in the delightful consciousness of being accepted, he could almost add, of being loved in return.

So encouraged, he ventured in still plainer terms to pour forth all the emotions of his heart, and to solicit that one rich reward which was to crown his happiness. He ceased, and heard, with inexpressible pleasure, the soft, low, tremulous accents of assent. He received the confession, timid, but sincere and full, of corresponding attachment, and fervently kissed the hand that was henceforth to be ever his.

Lacy lost no time in informing Mr. Morton of the happy result of his interview with Agnes; and had the pleasure of receiving that gentleman's sanction and approval, and an assurance of the satisfaction with which he should regard him as a son-in-law. He then, in obedience to his father's wishes, proceeded candidly to lay before Mr. Morton the extent of his expectations, his own and his father's knowledge of the circumstance which would deprive Agnes of the greater part of her fortune, and Sir William Lacy's liberal avowal, that such a loss on the part of his son's intended bride, would by no means militate against his consent. Mr. Morton suitably acknowledged the liberality of these sentiments, and expressed his wish that the friendship between the families, so lately established, and then so soon dismissed, might henceforth never be disturbed.

The time for the marriage was now to be fixed; and here Mr. Morton pleaded for delay. He re-

minded Lacy of the engagement from which Agnes had so lately been freed, and suggested the propriety of waiting at least beyond the time at which she was to have been united to Sackville; and to this suggestion Lacy's delicacy forbade him to offer any opposition. Mr. Morton also hinted at the prudence of waiting till such a time as would secure to Agnes the benefit of her whole fortune; but as this term of probation would amount to four years, he did not strongly press its adoption. Neither, if he had, would Lacy willingly have consented. He had obtained the sentiments of Agnes, and knew that she would not seriously regret the loss of so great a portion of her fortune, but be satisfied and happy in sharing with him diminished wealth, and gratified by so strong a practical assurance of being sought on account of endowments more intrinsic than those of fortune.

Of this assurance, more strong than words could convey, he vowed that nothing should deprive her. It was also a consolitory reflection to both of them, that the wealth of which they should be thus deprived would not be lost to the family, or diverted to unworthy objects; but was to be divided among the brothers and sisters of Agnes: and this consideration confirmed them still more in their resolution not to allow the diminution of fortune to be any impediment to their union.

Immediate information of the intended nuptials of Lacy and Agnes was sent to Mr. Hawksworth, with a request of his sanction, as guardian and trustee. It was also requested, that since Mr. Morton had suspended all communication with Sackville, Mr. Hawksworth would forward these tidings to him, and at the same time, desire to be informed whether it was Sackville's final determination to give or to withhold his consent. It was hoped that Mr. Hawksworth would make this demand plainly, and without urgency or any appearance of

entreating a favour for the Mortons, and that he would add, that the refusal of Sackville's consent would make no change in the intentions of the other parties, or delay the marriage for a single day.

This was accordingly done. The answer that Mr. Hawksworth received from Sackville was brief and unsatisfactory: without saying that his consent should be either given or withheld, it expressed wonder at having been applied to, and a request that he might not be addressed again upon such a subject. It was equivalent to a refusal; and Agnes was consequently compelled to look forward with resignation to the threatened forfeiture.

The Mortons were now preparing for their intended departure to the Continent. The approaching marriage of Agnes made no change in their plans. Lacy meant to follow them, and the marriage was to take place abroad, about the beginning of autumn.

One day, about a week before the time fixed for their journey, Lacy received a letter from Sackville. It contained merely these words: "I give you my permission to open, in the presence of Mr. Morton, the letter which I deposited in your hands at our last meeting."

Lacy immediately availed himself of this interesting and at present inexplicable permission. He took the unopened letter to Mr. Morton, and after relating some of the attendant circumstances, broke the seal in his presence.

Well was he rewarded for the strictness with which he had observed the conditions of Sackville. In the mysterious paper he read, with surprise, the following words: "If the engagement of marriage, now subsisting between Mr. Lacy and Miss Hartley, should at any future time be dissolved, and Mr. Lacy should make an offer of marriage to Miss Morton, and be accepted by that lady, I, Edward

Sackville, guardian and trustee of Miss Morton, do freely consent that such marriage may be solemnized, and that Miss Morton shall be exempted from the forfeiture to be incurred, in case of my non-approval, under the will of the late Mrs. Denham."

Below were a few lines addressed to Lacy, and which ran as follows: "You will perhaps be surprised at my manner of conveying this consent; you shall therefore know my reasons. I cannot, with propriety, openly advert to that event, which may never happen, and which, at this present time, circumstances seem imperatively to forbid. But I am nevertheless desirous to show you, that this consent, the greatest sacrifice of my own feelings that I have ever yet had the power to make, is not wrung from me by entreaty, nor is the tardy result of long consideration; that it is given in the only manner truly worthy of such a boon, is given promptly and unasked. I require only one favour in return; that neither you nor any one whom this, my consent, can in any degree concern, will ever write to me on the subject. I do not know whether I have merited thanks; but if I have, I do not want them."

It is needless to expatiate upon the surprise and pleasure which this singular disclosure caused. The pleasure was lessened only by Sackville's refusal to accept of thanks, and his uncompromising tone of sullen pride, which seemed to spurn at the bare thought of reconciliation. He was unworthy of being again received on terms of friendship: but true generosity is slow to scan the errors of one who has conferred a benefit, and finds enmity painful even towards those whom it cannot esteem.

Immediately after the foregoing discovery, Lacy wrote to his father, and enclosed the singular letter that conveyed it. He received from Sir William Lacy the following, soon afterwards, in reply:—

"My dear Herbert,

"I thank you for sending me, so speedily, tidings which you knew would give me pleasure. You have proved your disinterestedness to the heart's content of all by whom you are known and esteemed, as you deserve, and you may now take the gifts of fortune without a blush. The event has surprised me as little as any thing would that was equally unforeseen. Sackville's consent was not to be expected; but the strange mysterious manner in which it was given, seems to me perfectly natural and characteristic. Your scoundrel generally prefers a theatrical mode of doing good. The plain, simple, easy course pursued by common-place, honest people, is much too humble for the man, who, as he seldom does a praiseworthy action, likes, *when* he does, to do it splendidly. I admire his proud refusal to accept your thanks—thanks for an act of common justice! He knows that they are not due.

"Do not think me ungrateful for speaking so severely of the man who saved your life. Such benefits would become injuries if they prevented us from estimating correctly the conduct and character of those who conferred them. The man who saves a thousand lives obtains no privilege to play the villain. Establish the principle of making good deeds excuse bad ones, and morality becomes little more than a system of truck and barter. No one would have much more to do than just to keep his virtue at par, and saints and sinners might respectively exchange their moral scrip, like the bulls and bears of the stock exchange.

"Make a balance-sheet of good deeds, available in a court of justice, and contemplate the consequences. The Humane Society, on the credit of their resuscitations, might emulate with impunity, the *noyades* of the Loire; and the fireman, who had saved a house, could never be hanged for burning one.

"In the case of yourself and Sackville, I conceive the balance to have been fully adjusted. He saved your life before you were his rival: but since he has seen you in that character he has shown almost an equal disposition to take it. The return you owed him I conceive to have been paid. You refused to contest his claims and you have long persisted in thinking better of him than he deserved.

"Let me now turn to a more pleasing subject, the contemplation of your happy prospects. You are about to reap the reward of tried affection, and honourable self-denial, and to unite yourself to one who has proved that she is capable of something more than to flutter in the sunshine of prosperity: one who, though she can adorn society and enjoy its pleasures, has had the courage voluntarily to resign them: one who, through evil report and good report, if she dared not say she loved, at any rate esteemed you, and in the constancy of whose affection you may now repose the firmest confidence.

"You will soon become a husband, and your actions will then be invested with a responsibility which they had not before. On this account, though I confess myself feebly qualified for the office of a Mentor, yet, in my capacity of parent, let me give you my sentiments and advice. You will be placed above the necessity of a profession; but let not this circumstance render you inactive. Continue in parliament, and attend strictly to its honourable and important duties. Cultivate society —cultivate business. I do not ask you to make yourself a slave to either, or to indulge in visions of ambition. I merely point out a course which I consider to be most conducive to your respectability and happiness.

"The life of truest happiness is a life of occupation. I have acquired some right to say so, by having experienced the fallacy of its reverse. I do not mean that I have been unhappy. Were I to say

so, I should be very ungrateful for numerous blessings. I have had a large share of all that is held to constitute the materials of happiness; and none perhaps can have passed through life with fewer crosses. But it is on this account I speak. It is in reviewing my advantages that I am made sensible that I have not been so happy as I ought to have been; and loaded as I am with benefits, *I can* estimate with greater accuracy the little that was wanting to complete the sum of my felicity.

"I know that I wanted occupation, and an object. I had neither a prospect to interest me, nor a gratifying retrospect: all was centred in the present. I set out with the advantages of good family, respectable station, ample fortune, and, I will add, no mean abilities. The three former I retain, but what use have I made of the latter? None,—I grieve to say it—none. Indolence and fastidiousness have prevented me. Cursed with a sensitive delicacy, and a hatred of exertion, I always quickly discovered something coarse, mean, or revolting in every thing that I had a disinclination to do. The paths to Parliament were miry; office, a state of corruption; all business brings one into contact with rogues; and even the exertions which society demands may be reprobated as subserviency and cringing.

"I cared for nothing, and would do nothing. I was and would be independent—and independence has a flattering sound. It is the noblest, safest plea that was ever made for absence of exertion, and deserves to be engraved on the most towering pinnacle of the castle of indolence. I would not press, and labour, and elbow, and truckle: I would look with calm superiority on the distant turmoil, and enjoy the charms of literary leisure. Literary leisure! Choice and beautiful phrase! Its very alliteration is sweet and seductive. But call it by its true name, literary idleness, and how much of

its fancied dignity is lost! Yet such was mine; and I can remember to have regarded exertion in that walk as a degrading drudgery. It is easy to wrap one's self up in fancied importance, and say, 'my mind to me a kingdom is.' Yes, such a king I was, but it was a '*Roy faineant*,' a sort of rural Sardanapalus in my petty territory.

"Believe me when I say, that I now look back with pain on all that I have neglected to do. I have promoted no great or useful object—have connected my name with no interesting event—have written nothing—have spoken nothing—have impressed on no one the belief that I have those talents which I am really conscious of possessing. I write this, not in mortified pride, but in humble regret; not with the hope of a complimentary refutation, but with the worthier hope of affording a useful warning to you.

"Having spoken so freely of myself, I may say a little about your future father-in-law, and bid you draw other warnings from him. Morton and myself have been two opposites, between whose different lines of conduct I counsel you to pursue a middle course. I have sacrificed too little for society: he has sacrificed too much. Though I am sorry for his misfortunes, I have some consolation in thinking that the consequences of his extreme have been by far the most serious. But, on the other hand, I am bound to consider that the misemployed advantages were much greater on my side. We had both of us sufficient fortune; but he is of low extraction, and I of ancient descent. In me, perhaps, the consciousness of birth has encouraged an indolent security; in him the want of it has led to the ruinous substitute of lavish ostentation.

"I may probably, be inclined to overrate the consequences of birth and station; but they have, at least, this advantage, that they are the pledges of

honourable conduct, and afford to pride a less sordid aliment than money. Wealth, if viewed as the chief source and ground-work of distinction, must infallibly narrow the mind of its possessor. The purse-proud man is generally allowed to be the least endurable of coxcombs. He is content with none but *conspicuous* points of superiority, and will often secretly descend to meanness, from which an ancient lineage would have saved him. I conceive Morton to be naturally a generous, honourable, high-minded man. Some points of his conduct have evinced it. But the want of high descent to serve as a *fulcrum* to his ambition of fashionable distinction—his restless sense of insecurity—his feverish struggle for an eminence which he was to gain, partly by manœuvring and cringing, partly by means of a lavish expenditure—all this has debased an honourable mind, and led him through a long train of secret humiliation to one that was signal and decisive.

"I once did him less than justice; for, I will own, that I felt a secret jealousy of his success, which jealousy has since been extinguished by his fall. It shocked my aristocratical prejudices to perceive that a man, with less ostensible pretensions, was more courted than myself; and those prejudices were fostered by seclusion. But I have learned to shake off some portion of my former exclusiveness, and to applaud the liberal spirit of these times, which presents no insurmountable barrier to any species of ambition.

"Let me now congratulate you, my dear Herbert, on having escaped unhurt from the treachery and artifice by which you have been assailed. Let not your trials tend to give you a worse opinion of human nature; let them not weaken your honourable confidence and freedom from suspicion. You have pursued a straight and manly course, and it has led you to your safety. While knaves are run-

ning each other; by the vile acts which helped to raise them, the honest object of their mutual attack walks through unhurt and unsuspecting. But were it otherwise, were it necessary to repel the creatures with their own weapons, rather, I will say, than have recourse to the dirty task of countermining, it were better to be libelled and deceived, and be able to exclaim, like another Francis, 'All is lost except our honour.'

"I will say no more, for I seem to have given you too long a lecture, when I consider how little you need it.

"And now, my dear Herbert, farewell, and with every heartfelt wish for the happiness of yourself, and your intended bride,

"Believe me, ever your most affectionate father,

"W. LACY."

THE END.